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WOOD'S POEMS

ILLUSTRATED BY MARK MOSELEY

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A STORY AT HASTINGS	OUR LADIES ORNAMENT



P O E M S
BY
THOMAS HOOD.

AGAIN ILLUSTRATED BY
BIRKET FOSTER.



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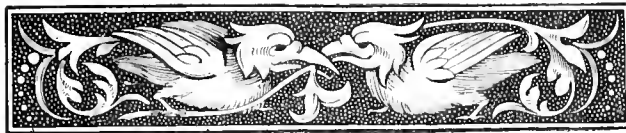
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The Dream of Eugene Aram.

T WAS in the prime of summer time,
An evening calm and cool,
And four-and-twenty happy boys
Came bounding out of school :
There were some that ran and some that leapt,
Like troutlets in a pool.
Away they sped with gamesome minds,
And souls untouch'd by sin ;
To a level mead they came, and there
They drave the wickets in :
Pleasantly shone the setting sun
Over the town of Lynn.
Like sportive deer they coursed about,
And shouted as they ran,—
Turning to mirth all things of earth,
As only boyhood can ;
But the Usher sat remote from all
A melancholy man !

His hat was off, his vest apart,
To catch heaven's blessed breeze ;
For a burning thought was in his brow,
And his bosom ill at ease :
So he lean'd his head on his hands, and read
The book between his knees !

Leaf after leaf he turn'd it o'er,
Nor ever glanced aside,
For the peace of his soul he read that book
In the golden eventide :
Much study had made him very lean,
And pale, and leaden-eyed.

At last he shut the ponderous tome,
With a fast and fervent grasp
He strain'd the dusky covers close,
And fix'd the brazen hasp :
" Oh, God ! could I so close my mind,
And clasp it with a clasp !"

Then leaping on his feet upright,
Some moody turns he took,—
Now up the mead, then down the mead,
And past a shady nook,—
And, lo ! he saw a little boy
That pored upon a book !

“ My gentle lad, what is't you read—
Romance or fairy fable ?
Or is it some historic page,
Of kings and crowns unstable ? ”
The young boy gave an upward glance,—
“ It is ‘ The Death of Abel.’ ”

The Usher took six hasty strides,
As smit with sudden pain,—
Six hasty strides beyond the place,
Then slowly back again ;
And down he sat beside the lad,
And talk'd with him of Cain ;
And, long since then, of bloody men,
Whose deeds tradition saves ;
Of lonely folk cut off unseen,
And hid in sudden graves ;
Of horrid stabs, in groves forlorn,
And murders done in caves ;
And how the sprites of injured men
Shriek upward from the sod,—
Aye, how the ghostly hand will point
To show the burial clod ;
And unknown facts of guilty acts
Are seen in dreams from God !

He told how murderers walk the earth
 Beneath the curse of Cain,—
With crimson clouds before their eyes,
 And flames about their brain :
For blood has left upon their souls
 Its everlasting stain !

“ And well,” quoth he, “ I know, for truth,
 Their pangs must be extreme,—
Woe, woe, unutterable woe,—
 Who spill life’s sacred stream !
For why ? Methought, last night, I wrought
 A murder, in my dream !

“ One that had never done me wrong—
 A feeble man, and old ;
I led him to a lonely field,—
 The moon shone clear and cold :
Now here, said I, this man shall die,
 And I will have his gold !

“ Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
 And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash with a hasty knife,—
 And then the deed was done :
There was nothing lying at my foot
 But lifeless flesh and bone !

“ Nothing but lifeless flesh and bone,
That could not do me ill ;
And yet I fear'd him all the more,
For lying there so still :
There was a manhood in his look,
That murder could not kill !

“ And, lo ! the universal air
Seem'd lit with ghastly flame :—
Ten thousand thousand dreadful eyes
Were looking down in blame :
I took the dead man by his hand,
And call'd upon his name !

“ Oh, God ! it made me quake to see
Such sense within the slain !
But when I touch'd the lifeless clay,
The blood gush'd out amain !
For every clot, a burning spot
Was scorching in my brain !

“ My head was like an ardent coal,
My heart as solid ice ;
My wretched, wretched soul, I knew,
Was at the Devil's price ;
A dozen times I groan'd ; the dead
Had never groan'd but twice !

“ And now, from forth the frowning sky,
From the heaven's topmost height,
I heard a voice—the awful voice
Of the blood-avenging Sprite :—
'Thou guilty man ! take up thy dead
And hide it from my sight !'

“ I took the dreary body up,
And cast it in a stream,—
A sluggish water, black as ink,
The depth was so extreme :—
My gentle boy, remember this
Is nothing but a dream !

“ Down went the corse with a hollow plunge,
And vanish'd in the pool !
Anon I cleansed my bloody hands,
And wash'd my forehead cool,
And sat among the urchins young,
That evening in the school.

“ Oh, heaven ! to think of their white souls,
And mine so black and grim !
I could not share in childish prayer,
Nor join in Evening Hymn :
Like a Devil of the Pit I seem'd
'Mid holy Cherubim !

“And peace went with them, one and all,
And each calm pillow spread ;
But Guilt was my grim chamberlain
That lighted me to bed ;
And drew my midnight curtains round,
With fingers bloody red !

“All night I lay in agony,
In anguish dark and deep :
My fever'd eyes I dared not close,
But stared aghast at Sleep :
For Sin had render'd unto her
The keys of Hell to keep !

“All night I lay in agony,
From weary chime to chime,
With one besetting horrid hint,
That rack'd me all the time ;
A mighty yearning, like the first
Fierce impulse unto crime !

“One stern tyrannic thought, that made
All other thoughts its slave ;
Stronger and stronger every pulse
Did that temptation crave,—
Still urging me to go and see
The Dead Man in his grave !

“ Heavily I rose up, as soon
As light was in the sky,
And sought the black accursed pool
With a wild misgiving eye ;
And I saw the Dead in the river bed,
For the faithless stream was dry

“ Merrily rose the lark, and shook
The dew-drop from its wing :
But I never marked its morning flight,
I never heard it sing :
For I was stooping once again
Under the horrid thing.

“ With breathless speed, like a soul in chase,
I took him up and ran ;—
There was no time to dig a grave
Before the day began :
In a lonesome wood, with heaps of leaves,
I hid the murder'd man !

“ And all that day I read in school,
But my thought was other-where.
As soon as the mid-day task was done,
In secret I was there :
And a mighty wind had swept the leaves,
And still the corse was bare !

“ Then down I cast me on my face,
And first began to weep,
For I knew my secret then was one
That earth refused to keep :
Or land or sea, though he should be
Ten thousand fathoms deep.

“ So wills the fierce avenging Sprite,
Till blood for blood atones !
Ay, though he's buried in a cave,
And trodden down with stones,
And years have rotted off his flesh,—
The world shall see his bones !

“ Oh, God ! that horrid, horrid dream
Besets me now awake !
Again—again, with dizzy brain,
The human life I take ;
And my red right hand grows raging hot,
Like Cranmer's at the stake.

“ And still no peace for the restless clay,
Will wave or mould allow ;
The horrid thing pursues my soul,—
It stands before me now ! ”
The fearful Boy look'd up and saw
Huge drops upon his brow.

That very night, while gentle sleep
The urchin eyelids kiss'd,
Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist ;
And Eugene Aram walk'd between,
With gyves upon his wrist.







Autumn.



THE Autumn is old,
The sere leaves are flying ;
He hath gather'd up gold,
And now he is dying :
Old Age, begin sighing !

The vintage is ripe,
The harvest is heaping ;—
But some that have sow'd `
Have no riches for reaping :—
Poor wretch, fall a-weeping !

The year's in the wane,
There is nothing adorning,
The night has no eve,
And the day has no morning ;—
Cold winter gives warning.

The rivers run chill,
The red sun is sinking,
And I am grown old,
And life is fast shrinking ;—
Here's enow for sad thinking.





The Flower.



LONE, across a foreign plain,
The Exile slowly wanders,
And on his Isle beyond the main
With sadden'd spirit ponders :

This lovely Isle beyond the sea,
With all its household treasures ;
Its cottage homes, its merry birds,
And all its rural pleasures.

Its leafy woods, its shady vales,
Its moors, and purple heather ;
Its verdant fields bedeck'd with stars
His childhood loved to gather :

When lo ! he starts, with glad surprise,
Home-joys come rushing o'er him.
For "modest, wee, and crimson-tipp'd,"
He spies the flower before him !

With eager haste he stoops him down,
His eyes with moisture hazy,
And as he plucks the simple bloom,
He murmurs, "Lawk-a-daisy!"









The Elm Tree.

A DREAM IN THE WOODS.

T WAS in a shady Avenue,
Where lofty Elms abound—
And from a Tree
There came to me
A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
And sometimes underground.

Amongst the leaves it seem'd to sigh,
Amid the boughs to moan ;
It mutter'd in the stem, and then
The roots took up the tone ;
As if beneath the dewy grass
The dead began to groan.

No breeze there was to stir the leaves ;
 No bolts that tempests launch,
To rend the trunk or rugged bark ;
 No gale to bend the branch ;
No quake of earth to heave the roots,
 That stood so stiff and staunch.

No bird was preening up aloft,
 To rustle with its wing ;
No squirrel, in its sport or fear,
 From bough to bough to spring ;
 The solid bole
 Had ne'er a hole
To hide a living thing !

No scooping hollow cell to lodge
 A furtive beast or fowl,
 The martin, bat,
 Or forest cat
 That nightly loves to prowl,
Nor ivy nook so apt to shroud
 The moping, snoring owl.

But still the sound was in my ear,
 A sad and solemn sound,

That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
And sometimes underground—
'Twas in a shady Avenue
Where lofty Elms abound.

O hath the Dryad still a tongue
In this ungenial clime ?
Have Sylvan Spirits still a voice
As in the classic prime—
To make the forest voluble,
As in the olden time ?

The olden time is dead and gone ;
Its years have fill'd their sum—
And e'en in Greece—her native Greece—
The Sylvan Nymph is dumb—
From ash, and beech, and aged oak,
No classic whispers come.

From Poplar, Pine, and drooping Birch,
And fragrant Linden Trees,
No living sound
E'er hovers round,
Unless the vagrant breeze,
The music of the merry bird,
Or hum of busy bees.

But busy bees forsake the Elm
That bears no bloom aloft—
The Finch was in the hawthorn-bush,
The Blackbird in the croft ;
And among the firs the brooding Dove,
That else might murmur soft.

Yet still I heard that solemn sound,
And sad it was to boot,
From ev'ry overhanging bough,
And each minuter shoot ;
From rugged trunk and mossy rind,
And from the twisted root.

From these,—a melancholy moan ;
From those,—a dreary sigh ;
As if the boughs were wintry bare,
And wild winds sweeping by—
Whereas the smallest fleecy cloud
Was stedfast in the sky.

No sign or touch of stirring air
Could either sense observe—
The zephyr had not breath enough
The thistle down to swerve
Or force the filmy gossamers
To take another curve.

In still and silent slumber hush'd
All Nature seem'd to be :
From heaven above, or earth beneath,
No whisper came to me—
Except the solemn sound and sad
From that MYSTERIOUS TREE !

A hollow, hollow, hollow sound,
As is that dreamy roar
When distant billows boil and bound
Along a shingly shore—
But the ocean brim was far aloof,
A hundred miles or more.

No murmur of the gusty sea,
No tumult of the beach,
However they may foam and fret,
The bounded sense could reach—
Methought the trees in mystic tongue
Were talking each to each !—

Mayhap, rehearsing ancient tales
Of greenwood love or guilt,
Of whisper'd vows
Beneath their boughs ;
Or blood obscurely spilt ;
Or of that near-hand Mansion House
A Royal Tudor built.

Perchance, of booty won or shared
 Beneath the starry cope—
Or where the suicidal wretch
 Hung up the fatal rope ;
Or Beauty kept an evil tryste,
 Insnares by Love and Hope.

Of graves, perchance, untimely scoop'd
 At midnight dark and dank—
And what is underneath the sod
 Whereon the grass is rank—
 Of old intrigues,
 And privy leagues,
 Tradition leaves in blank.

Of traitor lips that mutter'd plots—
 Of Kin who fought and fell—
God knows the undiscover'd schemes,
 The arts and acts of Hell,
Perform'd long generations since,
 If trees had tongues to tell !

With wary eyes, and ears alert,
 As one who walks afraid,
I wander'd down the dappled path
 Of mingled light and shade—
How sweetly gleam'd that arch of blue
 Beyond the green arcade !



How cheerly shone the glimpse of Heav'n
Beyond that verdant aisle !
All overarch'd with lofty elms,
That quench'd the light, the while,
As dim and chill
As serves to fill
Some old Cathedral pile !

And many a gnarled trunk was there,
That ages long had stood,
Till Time had wrought them into shapes
Like Pan's fantastic brood ;
Or still more foul and hideous forms
That Pagans carve in wood !

A crouching Satyr lurking here—
And there a Goblin grim—
As staring full of demon life
As Gothic Sculptor's whim—
A marvel it had scarcely been
To hear a voice from him !

Some whisper from that horrid mouth
Of strange, unearthly tone ;
Or wild infernal laugh, to chill
One's marrow in the bone.

But no—it grins like rigid Death,
And silent as a stone !

As silent as its fellows be,
For all is mute with them—
The branch that climbs the leafy roof—
The rough and mossy stem—
The crooked root,
And tender shoot,
Where hangs the dewy gem.

One mystic Tree alone there is,
Of sad and solemn sound—
That sometimes murmurs overhead,
And sometimes underground—
In all that shady Avenue,
Where lofty Elms abound.

PART II.

THE Scene is changed ! No green Arcade,
No Trees all ranged a-row—
But scatter'd like a beaten host,
Dispersing to and fro ;
With here and there a sylvan corse,
That fell before the foe.

The Foe that down in yonder dell
Pursues his daily toil ;
As witness many a prostrate trunk
Bereft of leafy spoil,
Hard by its wooden stump, whereon
The adder loves to coil.

Alone he works—his ringing blows
Have banish'd bird and beast ;
The Hind and Fawn have canter'd off
A hundred yards at least ;
And on the maple's lofty top,
The linnet's song has ceased.

No eye his labour overlooks,
Or when he takes his rest ;

Except the timid thrush that peeps
Above her secret nest.
Forbid by love to leave the young
Beneath her speckled breast.

The Woodman's heart is in his work,
His axe is sharp and good :
With sturdy arm and steady aim
He smites the gaping wood ;
From distant rocks
His lusty knocks
Re-echo many a rood.

His axe is keen, his arm is strong ;
The muscles serve him well ;
His years have reach'd an extra span,
The number none can tell ;
But still his lifelong task has been
The Timber Tree to fell.

Through Summer's parching sultriness,
And Winter's freezing cold,
From sapling youth
To virile growth,
And Age's rigid mould,
His energetic axe hath rung
Within that Forest old.

Aloft, upon his poising steel
The vivid sunbeams glance—
About his head and round his feet
The forest shadows dance ;
And bounding from his russet coat
The acorn drops askance.

His face is like a Druid's face,
With wrinkles furrow'd deep,
And tann'd by scorching suns as brown
As corn, that's ripe to reap ;
But the hair on brow, and cheek, and chin,
Is white as wool of sheep.

His frame is like a giant's frame ;
His legs are long and stark ;
His arms like limbs of knotted yew ;
His hands like rugged bark ;
So he felleth still
With right good will,
As if to build an Ark !

Oh ! well within *His* fatal path
The fearful Tree might quake
Through every fibre, twig, and leaf,
With aspen tremor shake .

Through trunk and root,
And branch and shoot,
A low complaining make !

Oh ! well to *Him* the Tree might breathe
A sad and solemn sound,
A sigh that murmur'd overhead,
And groans from underground :
As in that shady Avenue
Where lofty Elms abound !

But calm and mute the Maple stands,
The Plane, the Ash, the Fir,
The Elm, the Beech, the drooping Birch,
Without the least demur ;
And e'en the Aspen's hoary leaf
Makes no unusual stir.

The Pines—those old gigantic Pines,
That writhe—recalling soon
The famous Human Group that writhes
With Snakes in wild festoon—
In ramous wrestlings interlaced
A Forest Laocoon—

Like Titans of primeval girth
By tortures overcome,

Their brown enormous limbs they twine,
Bedew'd with tears of gum—
Fierce agonies that ought to yell,
But, like the marble, dumb.

Nay, yonder blasted Elm that stands
So like a man of sin,
Who, frantic, flings his arms abroad
To feel the Worm within—
For all that gesture, so intense,
It makes no sort of din !

An universal silence reigns
In rugged bark or peel,
Except that very trunk which rings
Beneath the biting steel—
Meanwhile the Woodman plies his axe
With unrelenting zeal !

No rustic song is on his tongue,
No whistle on his lips ;
But with a quiet thoughtfulness
His trusty tool he grips,
And, stroke on stroke, keeps hacking out
The bright and flying chips.

Stroke after stroke, with frequent dint
He spreads the fatal gash ;

Till, lo ! the remnant fibres rend,
With harsh and sudden crash,
And on the dull resounding turf
The jarring branches lash !

Oh ! now the Forest Trees may sigh,
The Ash, the Poplar tall,
The Elm, the Beech, the drooping Birch,
The Aspens—one and all,
With solemn groan
And hollow moan
Lament a comrade's fall !

A goodly Elm, of noble girth,
That, thrice the human span—
While on their variegated course
The constant Seasons ran—
Through gale, and hail, and fiery bolt,
Had stood erect as Man.

But now, like mortal Man himself,
Struck down by hand of God,
Or heathen Idol tumbled prone
Beneath th' Eternal's nod,
In all its giant bulk and length
It lies along the sod !



Ay, now the Forest Trees may grieve
And make a common moan
Around that patriarchal trunk
So newly overthrown ;
And with a murmur recognise
A doom to be their own !

The Echo sleeps : the idle axe,
A disregarded tool,
Lies crushing with its passive weight
The toad's reputed stool—
The Woodman wipes his dewy brow
Within the shadows cool.

No Zephyr stirs : the ear may catch
The smallest insect-hum ;
But on the disappointed sense
No mystic whispers come ;
No tone of sylvan sympathy,
The Forest Trees are dumb.

No leafy noise, nor inward voice,
No sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmurs overhead,
And sometimes underground ;
As in that shady Avenue,
Where lofty Elms abound !

PART III.

The deed is done : the Tree is low
That stood so long and firm :
The Woodman and his axe are gone,
His toil has found its term ;
And where he wrought the speckled Thrush
Securely hunts the worm.

The Cony from the sandy bank
Has run a rapid race,
Through thistle, bent, and tangled fern,
To seek the open space ;
And on its haunches sits erect
To clean its furry face.

The dappled Fawn is close at hand,
The Hind is browsing near,—
And on the Larch's lowest bough
The Ousel whistles clear ;
But checks the note
Within its throat,
As choked with sudden fear !

With sudden fear her wormy quest
The Thrush abruptly quits—

Through thistle, bent, and tangled fern
The startled Cony flits ;
And on the Larch's lowest bough
No more the Ousel sits.

With sudden fear
The dappled Deer
Effect a swift escape :
But well might bolder creatures start,
And fly, or stand agape,
With rising hair, and curdled blood,
To see so grim a Shape !

The very sky turns pale above ;
The earth grows dark beneath ;
The human Terror thrills with cold
And draws a shorter breath—
An universal panic owns
The dread approach of DEATH !

With silent pace, as shadows come,
And dark as shadows be,
The grisly Phantom takes his stand
Beside the fallen Tree,
And scans it with his gloomy eyes,
And laughs with horrid glee—

A dreary laugh and desolate,
Where mirth is void and null,
As hollow as its echo sounds
Within the hollow skull—
“ Whoever laid this tree along,
His hatchet was not dull !

“ The human arm and human tool
Have done their duty well !
But after sound of ringing axe
Must sound the ringing knell ;
When Elm or Oak
Have felt the stroke,
My turn it is to fell !

“ No passive unregarded tree,
A senseless thing of wood,
Wherein the sluggish sap ascends
To swell the vernal bud—
But conscious, moving, breathing trunks
That throb with living blood !

“ No forest Monarch yearly clad
In mantle green or brown ;
That unrecorded lives, and falls
By hand of rustic clown

But Kings who don the purple robe,
And wear the jewell'd crown.

“ Ah ! little recks the Royal mind,
Within his Banquet Hall,
While tapers shine and Music breathes
And beauty leaves the Ball,—
He little recks the oaken plank
Shall be his palace wall !

“ Ah, little dreams the haughty Peer,
The while his Falcon flies—
Or on the blood-bedabbled turf
The antler'd quarry dies—
That in his own ancestral Park
The narrow dwelling lies !

“ But haughty Peer and mighty King
One doom shall overwhelm !
The oaken cell
Shall lodge him well
Whose sceptre ruled a realm—
While he, who never knew a home,
Shall find it in the Elm !

“ The tatter'd, lean, dejected wretch,
Who begs from door to door,

And dies within the cressy ditch,
Or on the barren moor,
The friendly Elm shall lodge and clothe
That houseless man and poor !

“ Yea, this recumbent rugged trunk,
That lies so long and prone,
With many a fallen acorn-cup,
And mast, and firry cone—
This rugged trunk shall hold its share
Of mortal flesh and bone !

“ A Miser hoarding heaps of gold,
But pale with ague-fears—
A Wife lamenting love's decay,
With secret cruel tears,
Distilling bitter, bitter drops
From sweets of former years—

“ A Man within whose gloomy mind
Offence had deeply sunk,
Who out of fierce Revenge's cup
Hath madly, darkly drunk—
Grief, Avarice, and Hate shall sleep
Within this very trunk !

“ This massy trunk that lies along,
And many more must fall—

For the very knave
Who digs the grave,
The man who spreads the pall,
And he who tolls the funeral bell,
The Elm shall have them all !

“ The tall abounding Elm that grows
In hedgerows up and down ;
In field and forest, copse and park,
And in the peopled town,
With colonies of noisy rooks
That nestle on its crown.

“ And well th' abounding Elm may grow
In field and hedge so rife,
In forest, copse, and wooded park,
And 'mid the city's strife,
For, every hour that passes by
Shall end a human life ! ”

The Phantom ends : the shade is gone :
The sky is clear and bright ;
On turf, and moss, and fallen Tree,
There glows a ruddy light ;
And bounding through the golden fern
The Rabbit comes to bite.

The Thrush's mate beside her sits
And pipes a merry lay ;
The Dove is in the evergreens ;
And on the Larch's spray
The Fly-bird flutters up and down,
To catch its tiny prey.

The gentle Hind and dappled Fawn
Are coming up the glade ;
Each harmless furr'd and feather'd thing
Is glad, and not afraid—
But on my sadden'd spirit still
The Shadow leaves a shade.

A secret, vague, prophetic gloom,
As though by certain mark
I knew the fore appointed Tree,
Within whose rugged bark
This warm and living frame shall find
Its narrow house and dark.

That mystic Tree which breathed to me
A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
And sometimes underground ;
Within that shady Avenue
Where lofty Elms abound.





The Lay of the Labourer.



SPADE! a rake! a hoe!

A pickaxe, or a bill!

A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,

A flail, or what ye will—

And here's a ready hand

To ply the needful tool,

And skill'd enough, by lessons rough,

In Labour's rugged school.

To hedge, or dig the ditch,

To lop, or fell the tree,

To lay the swathe on the sultry field,

Or plough the stubborn lea :

The harvest stack to bind,

The wheaten rick to thatch,

And never fear in my pouch to find

The tinder or the match.

To a flaming barn or farm
My fancies never roam ;
The fire I yearn to kindle and burn
Is on the hearth of Home ;
Where children huddle and crouch
Through dark long wintry days,
Where starving children huddle and crouch,
To see the cheerful rays,
A-glowing on the haggard cheek,
And not in the haggard's blaze !

To Him who sends a drought
To parch the fields forlorn,
The rain to flood the meadows with mud
The blight to blast the corn,
To Him I leave to guide
The bolt in its crooked path,
To strike the miser's rick, and show
The skies blood-red with wrath.

A spade ! a rake ! a hoe !
A pickaxe, or a bill !
A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what ye will—
The corn to thrash, or the hedge to plash,
The market-team to drive,

Or mend the fence by the cover side,
And leave the game alive.

Ay, only give me work,
And then you need not fear
That I shall snare his Worship's hare,
Or kill his Grace's deer ;
Break into his lordship's house,
To steal the plate so rich ;
Or leave the yeoman that had a purse
To welter in a ditch.

Wherever Nature needs,
Wherever Labour calls,
No job I'll shirk of the hardest work,
To shun the workhouse walls ;
Where savage laws begrudge
The pauper babe its breath,
And doom a wife to a widow's life,
Before her partner's death.

My only claim is this,
With labour stiff and stark,
By lawful turn, my living to earn,
Between the light and dark ;
My daily bread, and nightly bed,
My bacon, and drop of beer—

But all from the hand that holds the land,
And none from the overseer !

No parish money, or loaf,
No pauper badges for me,
A son of the soil, by right of toil
Entitled to my fee.
No alms I ask, give me my task ;
Here are the arm, the leg,
The strength, the sinews of a Man,
To work, and not to beg.

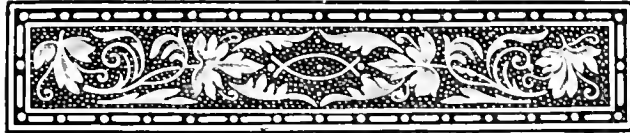
Still one of Adam's heirs,
Though doom'd by chance of birth
To dress so mean, and to eat the lean
Instead of the fat of the earth ;
To make such humble meals
As honest labour can,
A bone and a crust, with a grace to God,
And little thanks to man !

A spade ! a rake ! a hoe !
A pickaxe, or a bill !
A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what ye will—
Whatever the tool to ply.
Here is a willing drudge,

With muscle and limb, and woe to him
Who does their pay begrudge !

Who every weekly score
Docks labour's little mite,
Bestows on the poor at the temple door,
But robb'd them over night.
The very shilling he hoped to save,
As health and morals fail,
Shall visit me in the New Bastille,
The Spital, or the Gaol !





The Haunted House.

A ROMANCE.

PART I.



OME dreams we have are nothing else but dreams,
Unnatural, and full of contradictions ;
Yet others of our most romantic schemes
Are something more than fictions.

It might be only on enchanted ground ;
It might be merely by a thought's expansion ;
But, in the spirit or the flesh, I found
An old deserted Mansion.

A residence for woman, child, and man,
A dwelling place,—and yet no habitation ;
A House,—but under some prodigious ban
Of Excommunication.



Unhinged the iron gates half open hung,
Jarr'd by the gusty gales of many winters,
That from its crumbled pedestal had flung
One marble globe in splinters.

No dog was at the threshold, great or small ;
No pigeon on the roof—no household creature—
No cat demurely dozing on the wall—
Not one domestic feature.

No human figure stirr'd, to go or come,
No face look'd forth from shut or open casement ;
No chimney smoked—there was no sign of Home
From parapet to basement.

With shatter'd panes the grassy court was starr'd ;
The time-worn coping-stone had tumbled after !
And thro' the ragged roof the sky shone, barr'd
With naked beam and rafter.

O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear ;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear
The place is Haunted !

The flow'r grew wild and rankly as the weed,
Roses with thistles struggled for espial,
And vagrant plants of parasitic breed
Had overgrown the Dial.

But gay or gloomy, steadfast or infirm,
No heart was there to heed the hour's duration ;
All times and tides were lost in one long term
Of stagnant desolation.

The wren had built within the Porch, she found
Its quiet loneliness so sure and thorough ;
And on the lawn,—within its turfy mound,—
The rabbit made his burrow.

The rabbit wild and grey, that flitted thro'
The shrubby clumps, and frisk'd, and sat, and vanished
But leisurely and bold, as if he knew
His enemy was banish'd.

The wary crow,—the pheasant from the woods,—
Lull'd by the still and everlasting sameness,
Close to the mansion, like domestic broods,
Fed with a "shocking tameness."



The coot was swimming in the reedy pond,
Beside the water-hen, so soon affrighted ;
And in the weedy moat the heron, fond
Of solitude, alighted.

The moping heron, motionless and stiff,
That on a stone, as silently and stilly,
Stood, an apparent sentinel, as if
To guard the water-lily.

No sound was heard except, from far away,
The ringing of the witwall's shrilly laughter,
Or, now and then, the chatter of the jay,
That Echo murmur'd after.

But Echo never mock'd the human tongue ;
Some weighty crime, that Heaven could not pardon,
A secret curse on that old Building hung
And its deserted Garden.

The beds were all untouch'd by hand or tool ;
No footstep marked the damp and mossy gravel,
Each walk as green as is the mantled pool,
For want of human travel.

The vine unpruned, and the neglected peach,
Droop'd from the wall with which they used to grapple ;
And on the kanker'd tree, in easy reach,
Rotted the golden apple.

But awfully the truant shunn'd the ground,
The vagrant kept aloof, and daring Poacher,
In spite of gaps that thro' the fences round
Invited the encroacher.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

The pear and quince lay squander'd on the grass :
The mould was purple with unheeded showers
Of bloomy plums—a Wilderness it was
Of fruits, and weeds, and flowers !

The marigold amidst the nettles blew,
The gourd embraced the rose bush in its ramble,
The thistle and the stock together grew,
The holly-hock and bramble.

The bear-bine with the lilac interlaced,
The sturdy bur-dock choked its slender neighbour,
The spicy pink. All tokens were effaced
Of human care and labour.

The very yew Formality had train'd
To such a rigid pyramidal stature,
For want of trimming had almost regain'd
The raggedness of nature.

The Fountain was a-dry—neglect and time
Had marr'd the work of artisan and mason,
And efts and croaking frogs, begot of slime,
Sprawl'd in the ruin'd bason.

The Statue, fallen from its marble base,
Amidst the refuse leaves, and herbage rotten,
Lay like the Idol of some by-gone race,
Its name and rites forgotten.

On ev'ry side the aspect was the same,
All ruin'd, desolate, forlorn and savage :
No hand or foot within the precinct came
To rectify or ravage.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

PART II.

O, very gloomy is the House of Woe,
Where tears are falling while the bell is knelling,
With all the dark solemnities which show
That Death is in the dwelling.

O very, very dreary is the room
Where Love, domestic Love, no longer nestles,
But, smitten by the common stroke of doom,
The Corpse lies on the trestles !

But House of Woe, and hearse, and sable pall,
The narrow home of the departed mortal,
Ne'er look'd so gloomy as that Ghostly Hall,
With its deserted portal !

The centipede along the threshold crept,
The cobweb hung across in mazy tangle,
And in its winding sheet the maggot slept,
At every nook and angle.

The keyhole lodged the earwig and her brood,
The emmets of the steps had old possession,
And marched in search of their diurnal food
In undisturbed procession.

As undisturb'd as the prehensile cell
Of moth or maggot, or the spider's tissue,
For never foot upon that threshold fell,
To enter or to issue.

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

Howbeit, the door I push'd—or so I dream'd—
Which slowly, slowly gap'd,—the hinges creaking
With such a rusty eloquence, it seem'd
That Time himself was speaking.

But Time was dumb within that Mansion old,
Or left his tale to the heraldic banners,
That hung from the corroded walls, and told
Of former men and manners :—

Those tatter'd flags, that with the open'd door,
Seem'd the old wave of battle to remember,
While fallen fragments danced upon the floor,
Like dead leaves in December.

The startled bats flew out,—bird after bird,
The screech-owl overhead began to flutter,
And seemed to mock the cry that she had heard
Some dying victim utter !

A shriek that echo'd from the joisted roof,
And up the stair, and further still and further,
Till in some ringing chamber far aloof
It ceased its tale of murder !

Meanwhile the rusty armour rattled round,
The banner shudder'd, and the ragged streamer ;
All things the horrid tenor of the sound
Acknowledged with a tremor.

The antlers, where the helmet hung, and belt,
Stirr'd as the tempest stirs the forest branches,
Or as the stag had trembled when he felt
The blood-hound at his haunches.

The window jingled in its crumbled frame,
And thro' its many gaps of destitution
Dolorous moans and hollow sighings came,
Like those of dissolution.

The wood-louse dropp'd, and rolled into a ball,
Touch'd by some impulse occult or mechanic ;
And nameless beetles ran along the wall
In universal panic.

The subtle spider, that from overhead
Hung like a spy on human guilt and error,
Suddenly turn'd and up its slender thread
Ran with a nimble terror.

The very stains and fractures on the wall
Assuming features solemn and terrific,
Hinted some Tragedy of that old Hall,
Lock'd up in hieroglyphic.

Some tale that might, perchance, have solved the doubt,
Wherefore amongst those flags so dull and livid,
The banner of the BLOODY HAND shone out
So ominously vivid.

Some key to that inscrutable appeal,
Which made the very frame of Nature quiver ;
And every thrilling nerve and fibre feel
So ague-like a shiver.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted ;
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

If but a rat had linger'd in the house,
To lure the thought into a social channel !
But not a rat remain'd, or tiny mouse,
To squeak behind the panel.

Huge drops roll'd down the walls, as if they wept ;
And where the cricket used to chirp so shrilly,
The toad was squatting, and the lizard crept
On that damp hearth and chilly.

For years no cheerful blaze had sparkled there,
Or glanced on coat of buff or knightly metal ;
The slug was crawling on the vacant chair,—
The snail upon the settle.

The floor was redolent of mould and must,
The fungus in the rotten seams had quicken'd,
While on the oaken table coats of dust
Perennially had thicken'd.

No mark of leathern jack or metal can,
No cup—no horn—no hospitable token,—
All social ties between that board and Man
Had long ago been broken.

There was so foul a rumour in the air,
The shadow of a presence so atrocious ;
No human creature could have feasted there,
Even the most ferocious.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

PART III.

'Tis hard for human actions to account,
Whether from reason or from impulse only—
But some internal prompting bade me mount
The gloomy stairs and lonely.

Those gloomy stairs, so dark, and damp, and cold,
With odours as from bones and relics carnal,
Deprived of rite, and consecrated mould,
The chapel vault or charnel.

Those dreary stairs, where with the sounding stress
Of ev'ry step so many echoes blended,
The mind, with dark misgivings, feared to guess
How many feet ascended.

The tempest with its spoils had drifted in,
Till each unwholesome stone was darkly spotted,
As thickly as the leopard's dappled skin,
With leaves that rankly rotted.

The air was thick—and in the upper gloom
The bat—or something in its shape—was winging
And on the wall, as chilly as a tomb,
The Death's-Head moth was clinging.

That mystic moth, which, with a sense profound
Of all unholy presence, augurs truly ;
And with a grim significance flits round
The taper burning blue.

Such omens in the place there seem'd to be,
At every crooked turn, or on the landing,
The straining eyeball was prepared to see
Some Apparition standing.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

Yet no portentous Shape the sight amazed ;
Each object plain, and tangible, and valid ;
But from their tarnish'd frames dark Figures gazed,
And Faces spectre-palid.

Not merely with the mimic life that lies
Within the compass of Art's simulation ;
Their souls were looking thro' their painted eyes
With awful speculation.

On ev'ry lip a speechless horror dwelt ;
On ev'ry brow the burthen of affliction ;
The old Ancestral Spirits knew and felt
The House's malediction.

Such earnest woe their features overcast,
They might have stirr'd, or sigh'd, or wept, or spoken,
But save the hollow moaning of the blast,
The stillness was unbroken.

No other sound or stir of life was there,
Except my steps in solitary clamber,
From flight to flight, from humid stair to stair,
From chamber into chamber.

Deserted rooms of luxury and state,
That old magnificence had richly furnish'd
With pictures, cabinets of ancient date,
And carvings gilt and burnish'd.

Rich hangings, storied by the needle's art
With scripture history, or classic fable ;
But all had faded, save one ragged part,
Where Cain was slaying Abel.

The silent waste of mildew and the moth
Had marr'd the tissue with a partial ravage ;
But undecaying frown'd upon the cloth
Each feature stern and savage.

The sky was pale : the cloud a thing of doubt ;
Some hues were fresh, and some decay'd and duller ;
But still the BLOODY HAND shone strangely out
With vehemence of colour !

The BLOODY HAND that with a lurid stain
Shone on the dusty floor, a dismal token,
Projected from the casement's painted pane,
Where all beside was broken.

The BLOODY HAND significant of crime,
That glaring on the old heraldic banner,
Had kept its crimson unimpaired by time,
In such a wondrous manner.

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted !

The Death Watch tick'd behind the panel'd oak,
Inexplicable tremors shook the arras,
And echoes strange and mystical awoke,
The fancy to embarrass.

Prophetic hints that fill'd the soul with dread,
But thro' one gloomy entrance pointing mostly.
The while some secret inspiration said,
That Chamber is the Ghostly !

Across the door no gossamer festoon
Swung pendulous—no web—no dusty fringes,
No silky chrysalis or white cocoon
About its nooks and hinges.

The spider shunn'd the interdicted room,
The moth, the beetle, and the fly were banish'd.
And where the sunbeam fell athwart the gloom
The very midge had vanish'd.

One lonely ray that glanced upon a Bed,
As if with awful aim direct and certain,
To show the BLOODY HAND in burning red
Embroidered on the curtain.

And yet no gory stain was on the quilt—
The pillow in its place had slowly rotted ;
The floor alone retain'd the trace of guilt,
Those boards obscurely spotted.

Obscurely spotted to the door, and thence
With mazy doubles to the grated casement—
Oh what a tale they told of fear intense,
Of horror and amazement !

What human creature in the dead of night
Had coursed like hunted hare that cruel distance ?
Had sought the door, the window in his flight,
Striving for dear existence ?

What shrieking Spirit in that bloody room
Its mortal frame had violently quitted ?—
Across the sunbeam, with a sudden gloom,
A ghostly Shadow flitted.

Across the sunbeam, and along the wall,
But painted on the air so very dimly,
It hardly veil'd the tapestry at all,
Or portrait frowning grimly.

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!





A Storm at Hastings,

AND THE LITTLE UNKNOWN.

I WAS August—Hastings every day was filling—
Hastings, that “greenest spot on memory’s
waste!”

With crowds of idlers willing or unwilling
To be bedipped—be noticed—or be braced,
And all things rose a penny in a shilling,
Meanwhile, from window and from door, in haste
“Accommodation bills” kept coming down,
Gladding “the world of letters” in that town.

Each day pour’d in new coach-fulls of new cits,
Flying from London smoke and dust annoying,
Unmarried Misses hoping to make hits,
And new-wed couples fresh from Tunbridge toying.

Laceman and placeman, ministers and wits,
And quackers of both sexes, much enjoying
A morning's reading by the ocean's rim,
That sect delighting in the sea's broad brim.

And lo ! amongst all these appear'd a creature,
So small, he almost might a twin have been
With Miss Crachami—dwarfish quite in stature,
Yet well proportion'd—neither fat nor lean,
His face of marvellously pleasant feature,
So short and sweet a man was never seen—
All thought him charming at the first beginning—
Alas, ere long they found him far too winning !

He seem'd in love with chance—and chance repaid
His ardent passion with her fondest smile,
The sunshine of good luck, without a shade,
He staked and won—and won and staked—the bile
It stirr'd of many a man and many a maid,
To see at every venture how that vile
Small gambler snatch'd—and how he won them too—
A living Pam, omnipotent at loo !

Miss Wiggins set her heart upon a box,
'Twas handsome, rosewood, and inlaid with brass.

And dreamt three times she garnish'd it with stocks
Of needles, silks, and cottons—but alas !
She lost it wide awake.—We thought Miss Cox
Was lucky—but she saw three caddies pass
To that small imp!—no living luck could loo him !
Sir Stamford would have lost his Raffles to him !

And so he climb'd—and rode, and won—and walk'd,
The wondrous topic of the curious swarm
That haunted the Parade. Many were balk'd
Of notoriety by that small form
Pacing it up and down :—some even talk'd
Of ducking him—when lo ! a dismal storm
Stepp'd in—one Friday, at the close of day—
And every head was turn'd another way—

Watching the grander guest. It seem'd to rise
Bulky and slow upon the southern brink
Of the horizon—fann'd by sultry sighs—
So black and threatening, I cannot think
Of any simile, except the skies
Miss Wiggins sometime *shades* in Indian ink—
Miss shapen blotches of such heavy vapour,
They seem a deal more solid than her paper.

As for the sea, it did not fret, and rave,
And tear its waves to tatters, and so dash on
The stony-hearted beach ;—some bards would have
It always rampant, in that idle fashion,—
Whereas the waves roll'd in, subdued and grave,
Like schoolboys, when the master's in a passion,
Who meekly settle in and take their places,
With a very quiet awe on all their faces.

Some love to draw the ocean with a head,
Like troubled table-beer,—and make it bounce,
And froth, and roar, and fling, but this, I've said,
Surged in scarce rougher than a lady's flounce :—
But then, a grander contrast thus it bred
With the wild welkin, seeming to pronounce
Something more awful in the serious ear,
As one would whisper that a lion's near—

Who just begins to roar : so the hoarse thunder
Growl'd long—but low—a prelude note of death,
As if the stifling clouds yet kept it under,
But still it mutter'd to the sea beneath
Such a continued peal, as made us wonder
It did not pause more oft to take its breath,
Whilst we were panting with the sultry weather,
And hardly cared to wed two words together,

But watch'd the surly advent of the storm,
Much as the brown-cheek'd planters of Barbadoes
Must watch a rising of the Negro swarm :—
Meantime it steer'd, like Odin's old Armadas,
Right on our coast ;—a dismal, coal-black form ;—
Many proud gaits were quell'd—and all bravadoes
Of folly ceased—and sundry idle jokers
Went home to cover up their tongs and pokers.

So fierce the lightning flashed.—In all their days
The oldest smugglers had not seen such flashing,
And they are used to many a pretty blaze,
To keep their Hollands from an awkward clashing
With hostile cutters in our creeks and bays :—
And truly one could think without much lashing
The fancy, that those coasting clouds so awful
And black, were fraught with spirits as unlawful.

The gay Parade grew thin—all the fair crowd
Vanish'd—as if they knew their own attractions,—
For now the lightning through a near hand cloud
Began to make some very crooked fractions—
Only some few remain'd that were not cow'd,
A few rough sailors, who had been in actions,
And sundry boatmen, that with quick yeo's,
Lest it should *blow*,—were pulling up the *Rose* :





(No flower, but a boat)—some more were hauling
The *Regent* by the head :—another crew
With that same cry peculiar to their *calling*—
Were heaving up the *Hope* :—and as they knew
The very gods themselves oft get a mauling
In their own realms, the seamen wisely drew
The *Neptune* rather higher on the beach,
That he might lie beyond his billows' reach.

And now the storm, with its despotic power
Had all usurp'd the azure of the skies,
Making our daylight darker by an hour,
And some few drops—of an unusual size—
Few and distinct—scarce twenty to the shower,
Fell like huge tear-drops from a Giant's eyes—
But then this sprinkle thicken'd in a trice
And rained much *harder*—in good solid ice.

Oh ! for a very storm of words to show
How this fierce crash of hail came rushing o'er us !
Handel would make the gusty organs blow
Grandly, and a rich storm in music score us ;—
But ev'n his music seem'd composed and low,
When we were *handled* by this Hailstone Chorus ;
Whilst thunder rumbled, with its awful sound,
And frozen comfits roll'd along the ground—

As big as bullets :—Lord ! how they did batter
Our crazy tiles ;—And now the lightning flash'd
Alternate with the dark, until the latter
Was rarest of the two :—the gust too dash'd
So terribly, I thought the hail must shatter
Some panes,—and so it did—and first it smash'd
The very square where I had chose my station
To watch the general illumination.

Another, and another, still came in,
And fell in jingling ruin at my feet,
Making transparent holes that let me win
Some samples of the storm :—Oh ! it was sweet
To think I had a shelter for my skin,
Culling them through these “loopholes of retreat”—
Which in a little we began to glaze—
Chiefly with a jacktowel and some baize !

By which, the cloud had pass'd o'erhead, but play'd
Its crooked fires in constant flashes still,
Just in our rear, as though it had array'd
Its heavy batteries at Fairlight Mill,
So that it lit the town, and grandly made
The rugged features of the Castle Hill
Leap, like a birth, from chaos, into light,
And then relapse into the gloomy night—

As parcel of the cloud : the clouds themselves,
Like monstrous crags and summits everlasting,
Piled each on each in most gigantic shelves,
That Milton's devils were engaged in blasting.—
We could e'en fancy Satan and his elves
Busy upon those crags, and ever casting
Huge fragments loose,—and that we *felt* the sound
They made in falling to the startled ground.

And so the tempest scowl'd away,—and soon
Timidly shining through its skirts of jet,
We saw the rim of the pacific moon,
Like a bright fish entangled in a net,
Flashing its silver sides,—how sweet a boon,
Seem'd her sweet light, as though it would beget,
With that fair smile, a calm upon the seas—
Peace in the sky—and coolness in the breeze !

Meantime the hail had ceased :—and all the brood
Of glaziers stole abroad to count their gains ;—
At every window, there were maids who stood
Lamenting o'er the glass's small remains,—
Or with coarse linens made the fractions good,
Stanching the wind in all the wounded panes,—
Or, holding candles to the panes, in doubt :
The wind resolved—blowing the candles out.

No house was whole that had a southern front,—
No green-house but the same mishap befell ;
Bow-windows and *bell*-glasses bore the brunt,—
No sex in glass was spared !——For those who dwell
On each hill side, you might have swam a punt
In any of their parlours ;—Mrs. Snell
Was slopp'd out of her seat,—and Mr. Hitchin
Had a *flow'r*-garden wash'd into a *Kitchen*.

But still the sea was mild, and quite disclaim'd
The recent violence.—Each after each
The gentle waves a gentle murmur framed,
Tapping, like Woodpeckers, the hollow beach
Howbeit his *weather eye* the seaman aim'd
Across the calm, and hinted by his speech
A gale next morning—and when morning broke,
There was a gale—“ quite equal to bespoke.”

Before high water—(it were better far
To christen it not *water* then, but *waiter*,
For then the tide is *serving at the bar*)
Rose such a swell—I never saw one greater !
Black, jagged billows rearing up in war
Like ragged roaring bears against the baiter,
With lots of froth upon the shingle shed,
Like stout pour'd out with a fine *beachy head*.



No open boat was open to a fare,
Or launch'd that morn on seven-shilling trips,
No bathing woman waded—none would dare
A dipping in the wave—but waived their dips,
No seagull ventured on the stormy air,
And all the dreary coast was clear of ships ;
For two *lea shores* upon the river Lea
Are not so perilous as one at sea.

Awe-struck we sat, and gazed upon the scene
Before us in such horrid hurly-burly,—
A boiling ocean of mix'd black and green,
A sky of copper colour, grim and surly,—
When lo, in that vast hollow scoop'd between
Two rolling Alps of water,—white and curly !
We saw a pair of little arms a-skimming,
Much like a first or last attempt at swimming !

Sometimes a hand—sometimes a little shoe—
Sometimes a skirt—sometimes a hank of hair
Just like a dabbled seaweed rose to view,
Sometimes a knee, sometimes a back was bare—
At last a frightful sunset he threw
Right on the shingles. Any one could swear
The lad was dead—without a chance of perjury,
And batter'd by the surge beyond all surgery !

However we snatch'd up the corse thus thrown
Intending, Christian like, to sod and turf it,
And after venting Pity's sigh and groan,
Then Curiosity began with *her* fit ;
And lo ! the features of the Small Unknown !
'Twas he that of the surf had had this surfeit !—
And in his fob, the cause of late monopolies,
We found a contract signed Mephistophiles !

A bond of blood, whereby the sinner gave
His forfeit soul to Satan in reversion,
Providing in this world he was to have
A lordship over luck, by whose exertion
He might control the course of cards, and brave
All throws of dice,—but on a sea excursion
The juggling Demon, in his usual vein,
Seized the last cast—and *Nick'd* him in the *main* !







The Romance of Cologne.

TIS even—on the pleasant banks of Rhine
The thrush is singing, and the dove is cooing,
A youth and maiden on the turf recline
Alone—And he is wooing.

Yet woos in vain, for to the voice of love
No kindly sympathy the Maid discovers,
Though round them both, and in the air above,
The tender Spirit hovers !

Untouch'd by lovely Nature and her laws,
The more he pleads, more coyly she represses ;—
Her lips denies, and now her hand withdraws,
Rejecting his caresses.

Fair is she as the dreams young poets weave,
Bright eyes, and dainty lips, and tresses curly ;
In outward loveliness a child of Eve,
But cold as Nymph of Lurley !

The more Love tries her pity to engross,
The more she chills them with a strange behaviour ;
Now tells her beads, now gazes on the Cross
And Image of the Saviour.

Forth goes the Lover with a farewell moan,
As from the presence of a thing inhuman ;—
Oh ! what unholy spell hath turned to stone
The young warm heart of Woman !

* * * * *

'Tis midnight—and the moonbeam, cold and wan,
On bower and river quietly is sleeping,
And o'er the corse of a self-murdered man
The Maiden Fair is weeping.

In vain she looks into his glassy eyes,
No pressure answers to her hand so pressing ;
In her fond arms impassively he lies,
Clay-cold to her caressing.



Despairing, stunn'd by her eternal loss,
She flies to succour that may best beseem her ;
But lo ! a frowning Figure veils the Cross,
And hides the blest Redeemer.

With stern right hand it stretches forth a scroll,
Wherein she reads in melancholy letters,
The cruel fatal pact that placed her soul
And her young heart in fetters.

“Wretch ! Sinner : Renegade ! to truth and God,
Thy holy faith for human love to barter ! ”
No more she hears, but on the bloody sod
Sinks, Bigotry's last Martyr !

And side by side the hapless Lovers lie :
Tell me, harsh priest ! by yonder tragic token,
What part hath God in such a Bond, whereby
Or hearts or vows are broken ?





The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies.



WAS in that mellow season of the year
When the hot sun singes the yellow leaves
Till they be gold,—and with a broader sphere
The Moon looks down on Ceres and her sheaves;
When more abundantly the spider weaves,
And the cold wind breathes from a chiller clime;—
That forth I fared, on one of those still eves,
Touch'd with the dewy sadness of the time,
To think how the bright months had spent their prime.

So that, wherever I address'd my way,
I seem'd to track the melancholy feet
Of him that is the Father of Decay,
And spoils at once the sour weed and the sweet ;

Wherefore regretfully I made retreat
To some unwasted regions of my brain,
Charm'd with the light of summer and the heat,
And bade that bounteous season bloom again,
And sprout fresh flowers in mine own domain.

It was a shady and sequester'd scene,
Like those famed gardens of Boccaccio,
Planted with his own laurels ever green,
And roses that for endless summer blow ;
And there were fountain springs to overflow
Their marble basins,—and cool green arcades
Of tall o'erarching sycamores, to throw
Athwart the dappled path their dancing shades,—
With timid coney's cropping the green blades.

And there were crystal pools, peopled with fish,
Argent and gold ; and some of Tyrian skin,
Some crimson-barr'd ;—and ever at a wish
They rose obsequious till the wave grew thin
As glass upon their backs, and then dived in,
Quenching their ardent scales in watery gloom ;
Whilst others with fresh hues row'd forth to win
My changeable regard,—for so we doom
Things born of thought to vanish or to bloom.

And there were many birds of many dyes,
From tree to tree still faring to and fro,
And stately peacocks with their splendid eyes,
And gorgeous pheasants with their golden glow,
Like Iris just bedabbled in her bow,
Besides some vocalists without a name,
That oft on fairy errands come and go,
With accents magical ;—and all were tame,
And pecked at my hand where'er I came.

And for my sylvan company, in lieu
Of Pampinea with her lively peers,
Sate Queen Titania with her pretty crew,
All in their liveries quaint, with elfin gears,
For she was gracious to my childish years,
And made me free of her enchanted round ;
Wherefore this dreamy scene she still endears,
And plants her court upon a verdant mound,
Fenced with umbrageous woods and groves profound.

“ Ah me,” she cries, “ was ever moonlight seen
So clear and tender for our midnight trips ?
Go some one forth, and with a trump convene
My lieges all ! ”—Away the goblin skips
A pace or two apart, and deftly strips

The ruddy skin from a sweet rose's cheek,
Then blows the shuddering leaf between his lips,
Making it utter forth a shrill small shriek,
Like a fray'd bird in the grey owlet's beak.

And lo! upon my fix'd delighted ken
Appear'd the loyal Fays.—Some by degrees
Crept from the primrose buds that opened then,
And some from bell-shaped blossoms like the bees,
Some from the dewy meads, and rushy leas,
Flew up like chafers when the rustics pass;
Some from the rivers, others from tall trees
Dropp'd, like shed blossoms, silent to the grass,
Spirits and elfins small, of every class.

Peri and Pixy, and quaint Puck the Antic,
Brought Robin Goodfellow, that merry swain,
And stealthy Mab, queen of old realms romantic
Came too, from distance, in her tiny wain,
Fresh dripping from a cloud—some bloomy rain,
Then circling the bright Moon, had wash'd her car,
And still bedew'd it with a various stain:
Lastly came Ariel, shooting from a star,
Who bears all fairy embassies afar.

But Oberon, that night elsewhere exiled,
Was absent, whether some distemper'd spleen
Kept him and his fair mate unreconciled,
Or warfare with the Gnome (whose race had been
Sometime obnoxious), kept him from his queen,
And made her now peruse the starry skies
Prophetical, with such an absent mien ;
Howbeit, the tears stole often to her eyes,
And oft the Moon was incensed with her sighs—

Which made the elves sport drearily, and soon
Their hushing dances languish'd to a stand,
Like midnight leaves, when, as the Zephyrs swoon,
All on their drooping stems they sink unfann'd,—
So into silence droop'd the fairy band,
To see their empress dear so pale and still
Crowding her softly round on either hand,
As pale as frosty snowdrops, and as chill,
To whom the sceptred dame reveals her ill.

“ Alas,” quoth she, “ ye know our fairy lives
Are leased upon the fickle faith of men ;
Not measured out against Fate's mortal knives,
Like human gossamers,—we perish when
We fade and are forgot in worldly ken—



Though poesy has thus prolong'd our date
Thanks to the sweet Bard's auspicious pen
That rescued us so long !—howbeit of late
I feel some dark misgivings of our fate.

“ And this dull day my melancholy sleep
Hath been so thronged with images of woe,
That even now I cannot choose but weep
To think this was some sad prophetic show
Of future horror to befall us so,—
Of mortal wreck and uttermost distress,—
Yea, our poor empire's fall and overthrow,—
For this was my long vision's dreadful stress,
And when I waked my trouble was not less.

“ Whenever to the clouds I tried to seek,
Such leaden weight dragg'd these Icarian wings,
My faithless wand was wavering and weak,
And slimy toads had trespass'd in our rings—
The birds refused to sing for me—all things
Disown'd their old allegiance to our spells ;
The rude bees prick'd me with their rebel stings ;
And, when I pass'd, the valley-lily's bells
Rang out, methought, most melancholy knells.

“ And ever on the faint and flagging air
A doleful spirit with a dreary note
Cried in my fearful ear, ‘ Prepare ! prepare ! ’
Which soon I knew came from a raven’s throat,
Perch’d on a cypress-bough not far remote,—
A cursed bird, too crafty to be shot,
That alway cometh with his soot-black coat
To make hearts dreary :—for he is a blot
Upon the book of life, as well ye wot !—

“ Wherefore some while I bribed him to be mute,
With bitter acorns stuffing his foul maw,
Which barely I appeased, when some fresh bruit
Startled me all aheap !—and soon I saw
The horridest shape that ever raised my awe,—
A monstrous giant, very huge and tall,
Such as in elder times, devoid of law,
With wicked might grieved the primeval ball,
And this was sure the deadliest of them all !

“ Gaunt was he as a wolf of Languedoc,
With bloody jaws, and frost upon his crown ;
So from his barren poll one hoary lock
Over his wrinkled front fell far adown,
Well nigh to where his frosty brows did frown

Like jagged icicles at cottage eaves ;
And for his coronal he wore some brown
And bristled ears gather'd from Ceres' sheaves,
Entwined with certain sere and russet leaves.

“And lo ! upon a mast rear'd far aloft,
He bore a very bright and crescent blade.
The which he waved so dreadfully, and oft,
In meditative spite, that, sore dismay'd,
I crept into an acorn-cup for shade ;
Meanwhile the horrid effigy went by :
I trow his look was dreadful, for it made
The trembling birds betake them to the sky,
For every leaf was lifted by his sigh.

“And ever, as he sigh'd, his foggy breath
Blurr'd out the landscape like a flight of smoke :
Thence knew I this was either dreary Death
Or Time who leads all creatures to his stroke.
Ah wretched me ! ”—Here, even as she spoke,
The melancholy Shape came gliding in,
And lean'd his back against an antique oak.
Folding his wings, that were so fine and thin,
They scarce were seen against the Dryad's skin.

Then what a fear seized all the little rout !
Look how a flock of panic'd sheep will stare—
And huddle close—and start—and wheel about,
Watching the roaming mongrel here and there,—
So did that sudden Apparition scare
All close ahead those small affrighted things ;
Nor sought they now the safety of the air,
As if some leaden spell withheld their wings ;
But who can fly that ancientest of Kings ?

Whom now the Queen, with a forestalling tear
And previous sigh, beginneth to entreat,
Bidding him spare for love, her lieges dear ;
“ Alas ! ” quoth she, “ is there no nodding wheat
Ripe for thy crooked weapon, and more meet,—
Or wither'd leaves to ravish from the tree,—
Or crumbling battlements for thy defeat ?
Think but what vaunting monuments there be
Built in spite and mockery of thee.

“ O fret away the fabric walls of Fame,
And grind down marble Cæsars with the dust :
Make tombs inscriptionless—raze each high name
And waste old armours of renown with rust :
Do all of this, and thy revenge is just :

Make such decays the trophies of thy prime,
And check Ambition's overweening lust,
That dares exterminating war with Time,—
But we are guiltless of that lofty crime.

“ Frail feeble sprites !—the children of a dream !
Leased on the sufferance of fickle men,
Like motes dependent on the sunny beam,
Living but in the sun's indulgent ken,
And when that light withdraws, withdrawing then ;—
So do we flutter in the glance of youth
And fervid fancy,—and so perish when
The eye of faith grows aged ;—in sad truth,
Feeling thy sway, O Time ! though not thy tooth !

“ Where be those old divinities forlorn,
That dwelt in trees, or haunted in a stream ?
Alas ! their memories are dimm'd and torn,
Like the remainder tatters of a dream :
So will it fare with our poor thrones, I deem ;—
For us the same dark trench Oblivion delves,
That holds the wastes of every human scheme.
O spare us then,—and these our pretty elves,—
We soon, alas ! shall perish of ourselves ! ”

Now as she ended, with a sigh, to name
Those old Olympians, scatter'd by the whirl
Of Fortune's giddy wheel and brought to shame,
Methought a scornful and malignant curl
Show'd on the lip of that malicious churl,
To think what noble havocs he had made ;
So that I fear'd he all at once would hurl
The harmless fairies into endless shade,—
Howbeit he stopp'd awhile to whet his blade.

Pity it was to hear the elfins' wail
Rise up in concert from their mingled dread ;
Pity it was to see them, all so pale,
Gaze on the grass as for a dying bed ;—
But Puck was seated on a spider's thread,
That hung between two branches of a briar,
And 'gan to swing and gambol, heels o'er head,
Like any Southwark tumbler on a wire,
For him no present grief could long inspire.

Meanwhile the Queen with many piteous drops,
Falling like tiny sparks full fast and free,
Bedews a pathway from her throne ; — and stops
Before the foot of her arch enemy,
And with her little arms enfolds his knee,

That shows more grisly from that fair embrace ;
But she will ne'er depart. " Alas ! " quoth she,
" My painful fingers I will here enlace
Till I have gain'd your pity for our race.

" What have we ever done to earn this grudge,
And hate—(if not too humble for thy hating ?)—
Look o'er our labours and our lives, and judge
If there be any ills of our creating ;
For we are very kindly creatures, dating
With nature's charities still sweet and bland :—
O think this murder worthy of debating ! "
Herewith she makes a signal with her hand,
To beckon some one from the Fairy band.

Anon I saw one of those elfin things,
Clad all in white like any chorister,
Come fluttering forth on his melodious wings,
That made soft music at each little stir,
But something louder than a bee's demur
Before he lights upon a bunch of broom,
And thus 'gan he with Saturn to confer,—
And O his voice was sweet, touch'd with the gloom
Of that sad theme that argued of his doom !

Quoth he, " We make all melodies our care,
That no false discords may offend the Sun,
Music's great master—tuning everywhere
All pastoral sounds and melodies, each one
Duly to place and season, so that none
May harshly interfere. We rouse at morn
The shrill sweet lark ; and when the day is done,
Hush silent pauses for the bird forlorn,
That singeth with her breast against a thorn.

" We gather in loud choirs the twittering race,
That make a chorus with their single note ;
And tend on new-fledged birds in every place,
That duly they may get their tunes by rote
And oft, like echoes, answering remote,
We hide in thickets from the feather'd throng,
And strain in rivalry each throbbing throat,
Singing in shrill responses all day long,
Whilst the glad truant listens to our song.

" Wherefore, great King of Years, as thou dost love
The raining music from a morning cloud,
When vanish'd larks are carolling above,
To wake Apollo with their pipings loud .
If ever thou hast heard in leafy shroud

The sweet and plaintive Sappho of the dell,
Show thy sweet mercy on this little crowd,
And we will muffle up the sheepfold bell
Whene'er thou listenest to Philomel."

Then Saturn thus :—" Sweet is the merry lark,
That carols in man's ear so clear and strong ;
And youth must love to listen in the dark
That tuneful elegy of Tereus' wrong ;
But I have heard that ancient strain too long,
For sweet is sweet but when a little strange,
And I grow weary for some newer song ;
For wherefore had I wings, unless to range
Through all things mutable, from change to change !

" But wouldst thou hear the melodies of Time,
Listen when sleep and drowsy darkness roll
Over hush'd cities, and the midnight chime
Sounds from their hundred clocks, and deep bells toll
Like a last knell over the dead world's soul,
Saying, ' Time shall be final of all things,
Whose late, last voice must elegise the whole,'—
O then I clap aloft my brave broad wings,
And make the wide air tremble while it rings ! "

Then next a fair Eve-Fay made meek address,
Saying, “ We be the handmaids of the Spring ;
In sign whereof, May, the quaint broideress,
Hath wrought her samplers on our gauzy wing.
We tend upon buds' birth and blossoming,
And count the leafy tributes that they owe—
As, so much to the earth—so much to fling
In showers to the brook—so much to go
In whirlwinds to the clouds that made them grow.

“ The pastoral Cowslips are our little pets,
And daisy stars, whose firmament is green ;
Pansies, and those veil'd nuns, meek violets,
Sighing to that warm world from which they screen ;
And golden daffodils, pluck'd for May's Queen ;
And lonely harebells, quaking on the heath ;
And Hyacinth, long since a fair youth seen,
Whose tuneful voice, turn'd fragrance in his breath
Kiss'd by sad Zephyr, guilty of his death.

“ The widow'd primrose weeping to the moon
And Saffron crocus in whose chalice bright
A cool libation hoarded for the noon
Is kept—and she that purifies the light,
The virgin lily, faithful to her white,

Whereon Eve wept in Eden for her shame :
And the most dainty rose, Aurora's spright,
Our every godchild, by whatever name—
Spare us our lives, for we did nurse the same !”

Then that old Mower stamp'd his heel, and struck
His hurtful scythe against the harmless ground,
Saying, “ Ye foolish imps, when am I stuck
With gaudy buds, or like a wooer crown'd
With flow'ry chaplets, save when they are found
Wither'd ?—Whenever have I pluck'd a rose,
Except to scatter its vain leaves around ?
For so all gloss of beauty I oppose,
And bring decay on every flow'r that blows.

“ Or when am I so wroth as when I view
The wanton pride of summer ;—how she decks
The birthday world with blossoms ever-new,
As if Time had not lived, and heap'd great wrecks
Of years on years ?—O then I bravely vex
And catch the gay Months in their gaudy plight,
And slay them with the wreaths about their necks,
Like foolish heifers in the holy rite,
And raise great trophies to my ancient might.”

Then saith another, " We are kindly things,
And like her offspring nestle with the dove,—
Witness these hearts embroider'd on our wings,
To show our constant patronage of love ;—
We sit at even, in sweet bow'rs above
Lovers, and shake rich odours on the air,
To mingle with their sighs : and still remove
The startling owl, and bid the bat forbear
Their privacy, and haunt some other where.

" And we are near the mother when she sits
Beside her infant in its wicker bed ;
And we are in the fairy scene that flits
Across its tender brain : sweet dreams we shed,
And whilst the little merry soul is fled
Away, to sport with our young elves, the while
We touch the dimpled cheek with roses red,
And tickle the soft lips until they smile,
So that their careful parents they beguile.

" O then, if ever thou hast breathed a vow
At Love's dear portal, or at pale moon-rise
Crush'd the dear curl on a regardful brow,
That did not frown thee from thy honey prize—
If ever thy sweet son sat on thy thighs,

And wooed thee from thy careful thoughts within
To watch the harmless beauty of his eyes,
Or glad thy fingers on his smooth soft skin,
For Love's dear sake, let us thy pity win ! ”

Then Saturn fiercely thus :—“ What joy have I
In tender babes, that have devour'd mine own,
Whenever to the light I heard them cry,
Till foolish Rhea cheated me with stone ?
Whereon, till now, is my great hunger shown,
In monstrous dint of my enormous tooth ;
And—but the peopled world is too full grown
For hunger's edge—I would consume all youth
At one great meal, without delay or ruth !

“ For I am well nigh crazed and wild to hear
How boastful fathers taunt me with their breed,
Saying, ‘ We shall not die nor disappear,
But, in these other selves, ourselves succeed,
Ev'n as ripe flow'rs pass into their seed
Only to be renew'd from prime to prime,’
All of which boastings I am force to read,
Besides a thousand challenges to Time,
Which bragging lovers have compiled in rhyme.

“Wherefore, when they are sweetly met o' nights,
There will I steal and with my hurried hand
Startle them suddenly from their delights
Before the next encounter had been plann'd,
Ravishing hours in little minutes spann'd ;
But when they say farewell, and grieve apart,
Then like a leaden statue I will stand,
Meanwhile their many tears encrust my dart,
And with a ragged edge cut heart from heart.”

Then next a merry Woodsman clad in green,
Stept vanward from his mates, that idly stood
Each at his proper ease, as they had been
Nursed in the liberty of old Sherwood,
And wore the livery of Robin Hood,
Who wont in forest shades to dine and sup,—
So come this chief right frankly, and made good
His haunch against his axe, and thus spoke up,
Doffing his cap, which was an acorn's cup :—

“We be small foresters and gay, who tend
On trees, and all their furniture of green,
Training the young boughs airily to bend,
And show blue snatches of the sky between :—
Or knit more close intricacies, to screen

Birds' crafty dwellings, as may hide them best,
But most the timid blackbird's—she that, seen,
Will bear black poisonous berries to her nest,
Lest man should cage the darlings of her breast.

“We bend each tree in proper attitude,
And founting willows train in silvery falls;
We frame all shady roofs and arches rude,
And verdant aisles leading to Dryads' halls,
Or deep recesses where the Echo calls;—
We shape all plummy trees against the sky,
And carve tall elms' Corinthian capitals,—
When sometimes, as our tiny hatchets ply,
Men say, the tapping woodpecker is nigh.

“Sometimes we scoup the squirrel's hollow cell,
And sometime carve quaint letters on trees' rind,
That haply some lone musing wight may spell
Dainty Aminta,—Gentle Rosalind,—
Or chastest Laura,—sweetly call'd to mind
In sylvian solitudes, ere he lies down;—
And sometimes we enrich grey stems with twined
And vagrant ivy,—or rich moss, whose brown
Burns into gold as the warm sun goes down.

“ And, lastly, for mirth’s sake and Christmas cheer,
We bear the seedling berries, for increase,
To graft the Druid oaks, from year to year,
Careful that mistletoe may never cease ;—
Wherefore, if thou dost prize the shady peace
Of sombre forests, or to see light break
Through sylvan cloisters, and in spring release
Thy spirit amongst leaves from careful ake,
Spare us our lives for the Queen Dryad’s sake.”

Then Saturn with a frown :—“ Go forth, and fell
Oak for your coffins, and thenceforth lay by
Your axes for the rust, and bid farewell
To all sweet birds, and the blue peeps of sky
Through tangled branches, for ye shall not spy
The next green generation of the tree ;
But hence with the dead leaves, whenc’er they fly,—
Which in the bleak air I would rather see,
Than flights of the most tuneful birds that be.

“ For I dislike all prime, and verdant pets,
Ivy except, that on the aged wall
Preys with its worm-like roots, and daily frets
The crumbled tower it seems to league withal,
King-like, worn down by its own coronal : —

Neither in forest haunts love I to won,
Before the golden plumage 'gins to fall,
And leaves the brown bleak limbs with few leaves on,
Or bare—like Nature in her skeleton.

“ For then sit I amongst the crooked boughs,
Wooing dull Memory with kindred sighs ;
And there in rustling nuptials we espouse,
Smit by the sadness in each other's eyes ;—
But Hope must have green bowers and blue skies,
And must be courted with the gauds of Spring :
Whilst Youth leans god-like on her lap, and cries,
' Whall shall we always do, but love and sing ? '—
And Time is reckon'd a discarded thing.”

Here in my dream it made me fret to see
How Puck, the antic, all this dreary while
Had blithely jested with calamity,
With mis-timed mirth mocking the doleful style
Of his sad comrades, till it raised my bile
To see him so reflect their grief aside,
Turning their solemn looks to half a smile—
Like a straight stick shown crooked in the tide ;—
But soon a novel advocate I spied.

Quoth he, " We teach all natures to fulfil
Their fore-appointed crafts, and instincts meet,—
The bee's sweet alchemy,—the spider's skill,—
The pismire's care to garner up his wheat,—
And rustic masonry to swallows fleet,—
The lapwing's cunning to preserve her nest,—
But most, that lesser pelican, the sweet
And shrilly ruddock, with its bleeding breast,
In tender pity of poor babes distrest.

" Sometimes we cast our shapes, and in sleek skins
Delve with the timid mole, that aptly delves
From our example ; so the spider spins,
And eke the silk-worm, pattern'd by ourselves :
Sometimes we travail on the summer shelves
Of early bees, and busy toils commence,
Watch'd of wise men, that know not we are elves,
But gaze and marvel at our stretch of sense,
And praise our human like intelligence.

" Wherefore, by thy delight in that old tale,
And plaintive dirges the late robins sing,
What time the leaves are scattered by the gale,
Mindful of that old forest burying ; —
As thou dost love to watch each tiny thing,

For whom our craft most curiously contrives,
If thou hast caught a bee upon the wing,
To take his honey-bag,—spare us our lives,
And we will pay the ransom in full hives."

"Now by my glass," quoth Time, "ye do offend
In teaching the brown bees that careful lore,
And frugal ants, whose millions would have end,
But they lay up for need a timely store,
And travail with the seasons evermore ;
Whereas Great Mammoth long hath pass'd away,
And none but I can tell what hide he wore ;
Whilst purblind men, the creatures of a day,
In riddling wonder his great bones survey."

Then came an elf, right beauteous to behold,
Whose coat was like a brooklet that the sun
Hath all embroider'd with its crooked gold,
It was so quaintly wrought and overrun
With spangled trceries,—most meet for one
That was a warden of the pearly streams ;—
And as he stept out of the shadows dun,
His jewels sparkled in the pale moon's gleams,
And shot into the air their pointed beams.

Quoth he,—“We bear the gold and silver keys
Of bubbling springs and fountains, that below
Course thro’ the veiny earth,—which when they freeze
Into hard crysolites, we bid to flow,
Creeping like subtle snakes, when, as they go,
We guide their windings to melodious falls,
At whose soft murmurings, so sweet and low,
Poets have tuned their smoothest madrigals,
To sing to ladies in their banquet-halls.

“And when the hot sun with his steadfast heat
Parches the river god,—whose dusty urn
Drips miserably, till soon his crystal feet
Against his pebbly floor wax faint and burn,
And languished fish, unpoised, grow sick and yearn,—
Then scoop we hollows in some sandy nook,
And little channels dig, wherein we turn
The thread-worn rivulet, that all forsook
The Naiad-lily, pining for her brook.

“Wherefore, by thy delight in cool green meads,
With living sapphires daintily inlaid,—
In all soft songs of waters and their reeds,—
And all reflections in a streamlet made,
Haply of thy own love, that, disarray’d,

Kills the fair lily with a livelier white,—
By silver trouts upspringing from green shade,
And winking stars reduplicate at night,
Spare us, poor ministers to such delight.”

Howbeit his pleading and his gentle looks
Moved not the spiteful Shade :—Quoth he, “ Your taste
Shoots wide of mine, for I despise the brooks
And slavish rivulets that run to waste
In noontide sweats, or, like poor vassals, haste
To swell the vast dominion of the sea,
In whose great presence I am held disgraced,
And neighbour’d with a king that rivals me
In ancient might and hoary majesty.

“ Whereas I ruled in Chaos, and still keep
The awful secrets of that ancient dearth,
Before the briny fountains of the deep
Brimm’d up the hollow cavities of earth ;—
I saw each trickling Sea-God at his birth,
Each pearly Naiad with her oozy locks,
And infant Titans of enormous girth,
Whose huge young feet yet stumbled on the rock,
Stunning the early world with frequent shocks.

“ Where now is Titan, with his cumbrous brood,
That scared the world?—By this sharp scythe they fell
And half the sky was curdled with their blood :
So have all primal giants sigh’d farewell.
No wardens now by sedgy fountains dwell,
Nor pearly Naiads. All their days are done
That strove with Time, untimely, to excel ;
Wherefore I razed their progenies, and none
But my great shadow intercepts the sun ! ”

Then said the timid Fay—“ Oh ! mighty Time !
Well hast thou wrought the cruel Titans’ fall,
For they were stain’d with many a bloody crime :
Great giants work great wrongs,—but we are small,
For love goes lowly :—but Oppression’s tall,
And with surpassing strides goes foremost still
Where love indeed can hardly reach at all ;
Like a poor dwarf o’erburthen’d with good will,
That labours to efface the tracks of ill.—

“ Man even strives with Man, but we eschew
The guilty feud, and all fierce strifes abhor ;
Nay, we are gentle as the sweet heaven’s dew
Beside the red and horrid drops of war,
Weeping the cruel hates men battle for,



Which worldly bosoms nourish in our spite :
For in the gentle breast we ne'er withdraw,
But only when all love hath taken flight,
And youth's warm gracious heart is harden'd quite.

“ So are our gentle natures intertwined
With sweet humanities, and closely knit
In kindly sympathy with human kind.
Witness how we befriend, with elfin wit,
All hopeless maids and lovers,—nor omit
Magical succours unto hearts forlorn :—
We charm man's life, and do not perish it ;—
So judge us by the helps we showed this morn,
To one who held his wretched days in scorn.

“ 'Twas nigh sweet Amwell ;—for the Queen had task'd
Our skill to-day amidst the silver Lea,
Whereon the noontide sun had not yet bask'd ;
Wherefore some patient man we thought to see,
Planted in moss-grown rushes to the knee,
Beside the cloudy margin cold and dim ;
Howbeit no patient fisherman was he
That cast his sudden shadow from the brim,
Making us leave our toils to gaze on him.

“ His face was ashy pale, and leaden care
Had sunk the levell'd arches of his brow,
Once bridges, for his joyous thoughts to fare
Over those melancholy springs and slow,
That from his piteous eyes began to flow,
And fell anon into the chilly stream ;
Which, as his mimick'd image showed below,
Wrinkled his face with many a needless seam,
Making grief sadder in its own esteem.

“ And lo ! upon the air we saw him stretch
His passionate arms ! and, in a wayward strain,
He 'gan to elegise that fellow wretch
That with mute gestures answer'd him again,
Saying, ‘ Poor slave, how long wilt thou remain
Life's sad weak captive in a prison strong,
Hoping with tears to rust away thy chain,
In bitter servitude to worldly wrong ?—
Thou wear'st that mortal livery too long !’

“ This, with more spleenful speeches and some tears,
When he had spent upon the imaged wave,
Speedily I convened my elfin peers
Under the lily-cups, that we might save
This woeful mortal from a wilful grave

By shrewd diversions of his mind's regret,
Seeing he was mere melancholy's slave,
That sank wherever a dark cloud he met,
And straight was tangled in her secret net.

“Therefore, as still he watch'd the waters flow,
Daintily we transform'd, and with bright fins
Came glancing through the gloom ; some from below
Rose like dim fancies when a dream begins,
Snatching the light upon their purple skins ;
Then under the broad leaves made slow retire :
One like a golden galley bravely wins
Its radiant course,—another glows like fire,—
Making that wayward man our pranks admire.

“And so he banish'd thought, and quite forgot
All contemplation of that wretched face :
And so we wiled him from that lonely spot
Along the river's brink ; till, by heaven's grace,
He met a gentle haunter of the place,
Full of sweet wisdom gather'd from the brooks
Who there discuss'd his melancholy case
With wholesome texts learn'd from kind nature's books,
Meanwhile he newly trimm'd his lines and hooks.”

Herewith the Fairy ceased. Quoth Ariel now—
“ Let me remember how I saved a man,
Whose fatal noose was fastened on a bough,
Intended to abridge his sad life's span;
For haply I was by when he began
His stern soliloquy in life's dispraise,
And overheard his melancholy plan,
How he had made a vow to end his days,
And therefore follow'd him in all his ways.

“ Through brake and tangled copse, for much he loathed
All populous haunts, and roam'd in forest rude,
To hide himself from man. But I had clothed
My delicate limbs with plumes, and still pursued,
Where only foxes and wild cats intrude,
Till we were come beside an ancient tree
Late blasted by a storm. Here he renew'd
His loud complaints,—choosing that spot to be
The scene of his last horrid tragedy.

“ It was a wild and melancholy glen,
Made gloomy by tall firs and cypress dark,
Whose roots, like any bones of buried men,
Push'd through the rotten sod for fear's remark;
A hundred horrid stems, jagged and stark,

Wrestled with crooked arms in hideous fray,
Besides sleek ashes with their dappled bark,
Like crafty serpents climbing for a prey,
With many blasted oaks moss grown and grey.

“ But here upon his final desperate clause
Suddenly I pronouncèd so sweet a strain,
Like a pang’d nightingale, it made him pause,
Till half the frenzy of his grief was slain,
The sad remainder oozing from his brain
In timely ecstasies of healing tears,
Which through his ardent eyes began to drain ;—
Meanwhile the deadly Fates unclosed their shears :—
So pity me and all my fated peers ! ”

Thus Ariel ended, and was some time hush’d :
When with the hoary shape a fresh tongue pleads,
And red as rose the gentle Fairy blush’d
To read the records of her own good deeds :—
“ It chanced,” quoth she, “ in seeking through the meads
For honied cowslips, sweetest in the morn,
Whilst yet the buds were hung with dewy beads,
And Echo answer’d to the huntsman’s horn,
We found a babe left in the swarths forlorn.

“ A little, sorrowful, deserted thing,
Begot of love, and yet no love begetting ;
Guiltless of shame, and yet for shame to wring ;
And too soon banish'd from a mother's petting,
To churlish nurture and the wide world's fretting,
For alien pity and unnatural care ;—
Alas ! to see how the cold dew kept wetting
His childish coats, and dabbled all his hair,
Like gossamers across his forehead fair.

“ His pretty pouting mouth, witless of speech,
Lay half-way open like a rose-lipp'd shell ;
And his young cheek was softer than a peach,
Whereon his tears, for roundness, could not dwell,
But quickly roll'd themselves to pearls, and fell,
Some on the grass, and some against his hand,
Or haply wander'd to the dimpled well,
Which love beside his mouth had sweetly plann'd,
Yet not for tears, but mirth and smilings bland.

“ Pity it was to see those frequent tears
Falling regardless from his friendless eyes ;
There was such beauty in those twin blue spheres,
As any mother's heart might leap to prize ;
Blue were they, like the zenith of the skies

Softened betwixt two clouds, both clear and mild ;—
Just touch'd with thought, and yet not over wise,
They show'd the gentle spirit of a child,
Not yet by care or any craft defiled.

“ Pity it was to see the ardent sun
Scorching his helpless limbs—it shone so warm ;
For kindly shade or shelter he had none,
Nor mother's gentle breast, come fair or storm.
Meanwhile I bade my pitying mates transform
Like grasshoppers, and then, with shrilly cries,
All round the infant noisily we swarm,
Haply some passing rustic to advise—
Whilst providential Heaven our care espies.

“ And sends full soon a tender-hearted hind,
Who, wond'ring at our loud unusual note,
Strays curiously aside, and so doth find
The orphan child laid in the grass remote,
And laps the foundling in his russet coat,
Who thence was nurtured in his kindly cot :—
But how he prosper'd let proud London quote,
How wise, how rich, and how renown'd he got,
And chief of all her citizens, I wot.

“ Witness his goodly vessels on the Thames,
Whose holds were fraught with costly merchandise, —
Jewels from Ind, and pearls from courtly dames,
And gorgeous silks that Samarcand supplies :
Witness that Royal Bourse he bade arise,
The mart of merchants from the East and West ;
Whose slender summit, pointing to the skies,
Still bears, in token of his grateful breast,
The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest—

“ The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest,
That all the summer, with a tuneful wing,
Makes merry chirpings in its grassy nest,
Inspired with dew to leap and sing :—
So let us also live, eternal King !
Partakers of the green and pleasant earth :—
Pity it is to slay the meanest thing,
That, like a mote, shines in the smile of mirth :
Enough there is of joy’s decrease and dearth,

“ Enough of pleasure, and delight, and beauty,
Perish’d and gone, and hasting to decay ;—
Enough to sadden even thee, whose duty
Or spite it is to havoc and to slay :
Too many a lovely race razed quite away,

Hath left large gaps in life and human loving :—
Here then begin thy cruel war to stay,
And spare fresh sighs, and tears, and groans, reproving
Thy desolating hand for our removing."

Now here I heard a shrill and sudden cry,
And, looking up, I saw the antic Puck
Grappling with Time, who clutch'd him like a fly,
Victim of his own sport,—the jester's luck !
He, whilst his fellows grieved, poor wight, had stuck
His freakish gauds upon the Ancient's brow,
And now his ear, and now his beard, would pluck ;
Whereas the angry churl had snatch'd him now,
Crying " Thou impish mischief, who art thou ? "

" Alas ! " quoth Puck, " a little random elf,
Born in the sport of nature, like a weed,
For simple sweet enjoyment of myself,
But for no other purpose, worth, or need .
And yet withal of a most happy breed ;
And there is Robin Goodfellow besides,
My partner dear in many a prankish deed
To make dame Laughter hold her jolly sides,
Like merry mummers twain on holy tides.

“ ’Tis we that bob the angler’s idle cork,
Till e’en the patient man breathes half a curse ;
We steal the morsel from the gossip’s fork,
And curdling looks with secret straws disperse,
Or stop the sneezing chanter at mid verse :
And when an infant’s beauty prospers ill,
We change, some mothers say, the child at nurse :
But any graver purpose to fulfil,
We have not wit enough and scarce the will.

“ We never let the canker melancholy
To gather on our faces like a rust,
But gloss our features with some change of folly,
Taking life’s fabled miseries on trust,
But only sorrowing when sorrow must
We ruminate no sage’s solemn cud,
But own ourselves a pinch of lively dust
To frisk upon a wind,—whereas the flood
Of tears would turn us into heavy mud.

“ Beshrew those sad interpreters of nature,
Who gloze her lively universal law,
As if she had not form’d our cheerful feature
To be so tickled with the slightest straw !
So let them vex their mumping mouths, and draw

The corners downward, like a wat'ry moon,
And deal in gusty sighs and rainy flaw—
We will not woo foul weather all too soon,
Or nurse November on the lap of June.

“For ours are winging sprites, like any bird,
That shun all stagnant settlements of grief;
And even in our rest our hearts are stirr'd,
Like insects settled on a dancing leaf:—
This is our small philosophy in brief,
Which thus to teach hath set me all agape:
But dost thou relish it? O hoary chief!
Unclasp thy crooked fingers from my nape,
And I will show thee many a pleasant scrape.”

Then Saturn thus:—shaking his crooked blade
O'erhead, which made aloft a lightning flash
In all the fairies' eyes, dismally fray'd!
His ensuing voice came like the thunder crash—
Meanwhile the bolt shatters some pine or ash—
“Thou feeble, wanton, foolish, fickle thing!
Whom nought can frighten, sadden, or abash,—
To hope my solemn countenance to wring
To idiot smiles!—but I will prune thy wing!

“ Lo ! this most awful handle of my scythe
Stood once a May-pole, with a flowery crown,
Which rustics danced around, and maidens blithe,
To wanton pipings ;—but I pluck’d it down,
And robed the May Queen in a churchyard gown,
Turning her buds to rosemary and rue ;
And all their merry minstrelsy did drown,
And laid each lusty leaper in the dew ;—
So thou shalt fare—and every jovial crew ! ”

Here he lets go the struggling imp, to clutch
His mortal engine with each grisly hand,
Which frights the elfin progeny so much,
They huddle in a heap, and trembling stand
All round Titania, like the queen bee’s band,
With sighs and tears and very shrieks of woe !—
Meanwhile, some moving argument I plann’d,
To make the stern Shade merciful,—when lo !
He drops his fatal scythe without a blow !

For just at need, a timely Apparition
Steps in between, to bear the awful brunt ;
Making him change his horrible position,
To marvel at this comer, brave and blunt,
That dares Time’s irresistible affront,

Whose strokes have scarr'd even the gods of old :—
Whereas this seem'd a mortal, at mere hunt
For coney, lighted by the moonshine cold,
Or stalker of stray deer, stealthy and bold.

Who, turning to the small assembled fays,
Doffs to the lily queen his courteous cap,
And holds her beauty for a while in gaze,
With bright eyes kindling at this pleasant hap ;
And thence upon the fair moon's silver map,
As if in question of this magic chance,
Laid like a dream upon the green earth's lap ;
And then upon old Saturn turns askance,
Exclaiming, with a glad and kindly glance :—

“ Oh, these be Fancy's revellers by night !
Stealthy companions of the downy moth—
Diana's motes, that flit in her pale light,
Shunners of sunbeams in diurnal sloth ;—
These be the feasters on night's silver cloth ;
The gnat with shrilly trump is their convener,
Forth from their flowery chambers, nothing loth,
With lulling tunes to charm the air serener,
Or dance upon the grass to make it greener.

“ These be the pretty genii of the flow’rs,
Daintily fed with honey and pure dew—
Midsummer phantoms in her dreaming hours,
King Oberon, and all his merry crew,
The darling puppets of Romance’s view;
Fairies, and sprites, and goblin elves we call them.
Famous for patronage of lovers true ;—
No harm they act, neither shall harm befall them,
So do not thus with crabbed frowns appal them.”

O what a cry was Saturn’s then !—it made
The fairies quake. “ What care I for their pranks,
However they may lovers choose to aid,
Or dance their roundelays on flow’ry banks ?—
Long must they dance before they earn my thanks,—
So step aside, to some far safer spot,
Whilst with my hungry scythe I mow their ranks,
And leave them in the sun, like weeds, to rot,
And with the next day’s sun to be forgot.”

Anon, he raised afresh his weapon keen ;
But still the gracious Shade disarm’d his aim,
Stepping with brave alacrity between,
And made his sere arm powerless and tame.
His be perpetual glory for the shame

Of hoary Saturn in that grand defeat !—
But I must tell how here Titantia came
With all her kneeling lieges, to entreat
His kindly succour, in sad tones, but sweet.

Saying, “Thou seest a wretched queen before thee,
The fading power of a failing land,
Who for a kingdom kneeleth to implore thee,
Now menaced by this tyrant's spoiling hand ;
No one but thee can hopefully withstand
That crooked blade, he longeth so to lift.
I pray thee blind him with his own vile sand,
Which only times all ruins by its drift,
Or prune his eagle wings that are so swift.

“Or take him by that sole and grizzled tuft,
That hangs upon his bald and barren crown ;
And we will sing to see him so rebuff'd,
And lend our little mights to pull him down,
And make brave sport of his malicious frown,
For all his boastful mockery o'er men.
For thou wast born I know for this renown,
By my most magical and inward ken,
That readeth ev'n at Fate's forestalling pen.

“ Nay, by the golden lustre of thine eye,
And by thy brow's most fair and ample span,
Thought's glorious palace, framed for fancies high,
And by thy cheek thus passionately wan,
I know the signs of an immortal man,—
Nature's chief darling, and illustrious mate,
Destined to foil old Death's oblivious plan,
And shine untarnish'd by the fogs of Fate,
Time's famous rival till the final date !

“ O shield us then from this usurping Time,
And we will visit thee in moonlight dreams ;
And teach thee tunes, to wed unto thy rhyme,
And dance about thee in all midnight gleams,
Giving thee glimpses of our magic schemes,
Such as no mortal's eye hath ever seen ;
And, for thy love to us in our extremes,
Will ever keep thy chaplet fresh and green,
Such as no poet's wreath hath ever been !

“ And we'll distil the aromatic dews,
To charm thy sense, when there shall be no flow'rs ;
And flavour'd syrups in thy drinks infuse,
And teach the nightingale to haunt thy bow'rs,
And with our games divert thy weariest hours.

With all that elfin wits can e'er devise.
And, this churl dead, there'll be no hasting hours
To rob thee of thy joys, as now joy flies :"—
Here she was stopp'd by Saturn's furious cries.

Whom, therefore, the kind Shade rebukes anew,
Saying, "Thou haggard Sin, go forth, and scoop
Thy hollow coffin in some churchyard yew,
Or make th' autumnal flow'rs turn pale, and droop ;
Or fell the bearded corn, till gleaners stoop
Under fat sheaves,—or blast the piny grove ;—
But here thou shalt not harm this pretty group,
Whose lives are not so frail and feebly wove,
But leased on Nature's loveliness and love.

" 'Tis these that free the small entangled fly,
Caught in the venom'd spider's crafty snare ;
These be the petty surgeons that apply
The healing balsams to the wounded hare,
Bedded in bloody fern, no creature's care !—
These be providers for the orphan brood,
Whose tender mother hath been slain in air,
Quitting with gaping bill her darlings' food,
Hard by the verge of her domestic wood.

“ ’Tis these befriend the timid trembling stag,
When, with a bursting heart beset with fears,
He feels his saving speed begin to flag ;
For then they quench the fatal taint with tears,
And prompt fresh shifts in his alarm’d ears,
So piteously they view all bloody morts ;
Or, if the gunner, with his arm, appears,
Like noisy pyes and jays, with harsh reports,
They warn the wild fowl of his deadly sports.

“ For these are kindly ministers of nature,
To soothe all covert hurts and dumb distress ;
Pretty they be, and very small of stature,—
For mercy still consorts with littleness ;—
Wherefore the sum of good is still the less,
And mischief grossest in this world of wrong ;
So do these charitable dwarfs redress
The tenfold ravages of giants strong,
To whom great malice and great might belong.

“ Likewise to them are Poets much beholden
For secret favours in the midnight glooms ;
Brave Spenser quaff’d out of their goblet golden,
And saw their tables spread of prompt mushrooms,
And heard their horns of honeysuckle blooms

Sounding upon the air most soothing soft,
Like humming bees busy about the brooms,—
And glanced this fair queen's witchery full oft,
And in her magic wain soar'd far aloft.

“Nay I myself, though mortal, once was nursed
By fairy gossips, friendly at my birth,
And in my childish ear glib Mab rehearsed
Her breezy travels round our planet's girth,
Telling me wonders of the moon and earth ;
My gramarye at her grave lay I conn'd,
Where Puck hath been convened to make me mirth ;
I have had from Queen Titantia tokens fond.
And toy'd with Oberon's permitted wand

“With figs and plums and Persian dates they fed me,
And delicate cates after my sunset meal,
And took me by my childish hand, and led me
By craggy rocks crested with keeps of steel,
Whose awful bases deep dark woods conceal,
Staining some dead lake with their verdant dyes :
And when the West sparkled at Phœbus' wheel,
With fairy euphrasy they purged mine eyes,
To let me see their cities in the skies.

“ 'Twas they first school'd my young imagination
To take its flights like any new-fledged bird,
And show'd the span of winged meditation
Stretch'd wider than things grossly seen or heard.
With sweet swift Ariel how I soar'd and stirr'd
The fragrant blooms of spiritual bow'rs !
'Twas they endear'd what I have still preferr'd,
Nature's blest attributes and balmy pow'rs
Her hills and vales and brooks sweet birds and flow'rs !

“ Wherefore with all true royalty and duty
Will I regard them in my honouring rhyme,
With love for love, and homages to beauty,
And magic thoughts gather'd in night's cool clime,
With studious verse trancing the dragon Time,
Strong as old Merlin's necromantic spells ;
So these dear monarchs of the summer's prime
Shall live unstartled by his dreadful yells,
'Till shrill larks warn them to their flowery cells.”

Look how a poison'd man turns livid black,
Drugg'd with a cup of deadly hellebore,
That sets his horrid features all at rack,
So seem'd these words into the ear to pour
Of ghastly Saturn, answering with a roar

Of mortal pain and spite and utmost rage,
Wherewith his grisly arm he raised once more,
And bade the cluster'd sinews all engage,
As if at one fell stroke to wreck an age.

Whereas the blade flash'd on the dinted ground,
Down through his steadfast foe, yet made no scar
On that immortal Shade, or death-like wound ;
But Time was long benumb'd, and stood a-jar,
And then with baffled rage took flight afar,
To weep his hurt in some Cimmerian gloom,
Or meaner fames (like mine) to mock and mar,
Or sharp his scythe for royal strokes of doom,
Whetting its edge on some old Cæsar's tomb.

Howbeit he vanish'd in the forest shade,
Distantly heard as if some grumbling pard,
And, like Nymph Echo, to a sound decay'd ;—
Meanwhile the fays cluster'd the gracious Bard,
The darling centre of their dear regard :
Besides of sundry dances on the green,
Never was mortal man so brightly starr'd,
Or won such pretty homages, I ween.
“ Nod to him, Elves ! ” cries the melodious queen.

“ Nod to him, Elves, and flutter round about him,
And quite enclose him with your pretty crowd,
And touch him lovingly, for that, without him,
The silk-worm now had spun our dreary shroud ;—
But he hath all dispersed Death’s tearful cloud,
And Time’s dread effigy scared quite away :
Bow to him then, as though to me ye bow’d,
And his dear wishes prosper and obey
Wherever love and wit can find a way !

“ ’Noint him with fairy dew of magic savours,
Shaken from orient buds still pearly wet,
Roses and spicy pinks,—and, of all favours,
Plant in his walks the purple violet,
And meadow-sweet under the edges set,
To mingle breaths with dainty eglantine
And honeysuckles sweet,—nor yet forget
Some pastoral flowery chaplets to entwine,
To vie the thoughts about his brow benign !

“ Let no wild things astonish him or fear him,
But tell them all how mild he is of heart,
Till e’en the timid hares go frankly near him,
And eke the dappled does, yet never start ;
Nor shall their fawns into the thickets dart,

Nor wrens forsake their nests among the leaves,
Nor speckled thrushes flutter far apart :—
But bid the sacred swallow haunt his eaves,
To guard his roof from lightning and from thieves.

“Or when he goes the nimble squirrel's visitor,
Let the brown hermit bring his hoarded nuts,
For, tell him, this is Nature's kind Inquisitor,—
Though man keeps cautious doors that conscience shuts,
For conscious wrong all curious quest rebuts,—
Nor yet shall bees uncase their jealous stings,
However he may watch their straw-built huts ;—
So let him learn the crafts of all small things,
Which he will hint most aptly when he sings.”

Here she leaves off, and with a graceful hand
Waves thrice three splendid circles round his head ;
Which, though deserted by the radiant wand,
Wears still the glory which her waving shed,
Such as erst crown'd the old Apostle's head,
To show the thoughts, there harbour'd, were divine
And on immortal contemplations fed :—
Goodly it was to see that glory shine
Around a brow so lofty and benign !—

Goodly it was to see the elfin brood
Contend for kisses of his gentle hand,
That had their mortal enemy withstood,
And stay'd their lives, fast ebbing with the sand.
Long while this strife engaged the pretty band ;
But now bold Chanticleer, from farm to farm,
Challenged the dawn creeping o'er eastern land,
And well the fairies knew that shrill alarm,
Which sounds the knell of every selfish charm.

And soon the rolling mist, that 'gan arise
From plashy mead and undiscover'd stream,
Earth's morning incense to the early skies,
Crept o'er the falling landscape of my dream.
Soon faded then the Phantom of my theme—
A shapeless shade, that fancy disavow'd,
And shrank to nothing in the mist extreme.
Then flew Titania,—and her little crowd,
Like flocking linnets, vanish'd in a crowd.







The Mermaid of Margate.

QUEN Margate beach, where the sick one roams,
And the sentimental reads ;
Where the maiden flirts, and the widow comes—
Like the ocean—to cast her weeds ;—

Where urchins wander to pick up shells,
And the Cit to spy at the ships,—
Like the water gala at Sadler's Wells,—
And the Chandler for watery dips ;—

There's a maiden sits by the ocean brim,
As lovely and fair as sin !
But woe deep water and woe to him,
That she snareth like Peter Fin !

Her head is crown'd with pretty sea-wares,
And her locks are golden and loose ;
And seek to her feet, like other folks' heirs,
To stand, of course, in her shoes !

And all day long, she combeth them well,
With a sea shark's prickly jaw ;
And her mouth is just like a rose-lipped shell,
The fairest that man e'er saw !

And the Fishmonger, humble as love may be,
Hath planted his seat by her side ;
“ Good even, fair maid ! Is thy lover at sea,
To make thee so watch the tide ? ”

She turn'd about with her pearly brows :
And clasp'd him by the hand ;—
“ Come, love, with me ; I've a bonny house
On the golden Goodwin Sand.”

And then she gave him a siren kiss,
No honeycomb e'er was sweeter :
Poor wretch ! how little he dreamt for this
That Peter should be salt-Peter ;

And away with her prize to the wave she leapt,
Not walking, as damsels do,
With toe and heel, as she ought to have stept,
But she hopt like a Kangaroo !

One plunge, and then the victim was blind,
Whilst they gallop'd across the tide :
At last on the bank he waked in his mind,
And the Beauty was by his side.

One half on the sand, and half in the sea,
But his air all began to stiffen ;
For when he looked where her feet should be,
She had no more feet than Miss Biffen !

But a scaly tail of a dolphin's growth
In the dabbling brine did soak.
At last she opened her pearly mouth,
Like an oyster, and thus she spoke :—

“ You crimpt my father who was a skate ;—
And my sister you sold—a maid ;
So here remain for a fishlike fate,
For lost you are, and betray'd ! ”

And away she went, with a seagull's scream,
And a splash of her saucy tail ;
In a moment he lost the silvery gleam
That shone on her splendid mail !

The sun went down with a blood-red flame,
And the sky grew cloudy and black,
And the tumbling billows like leap-frog came,
Each over the other's back !

Ah, me ! it had been a beautiful scene,
With the safe terra-firma round :
But the green water-hillocks all seem'd to him,
Like those in a churchyard ground ;

And Christians love in the turf to lie,
Not in watery graves to be :
Nay, the very fishes will sooner die
On the land than in the sea :

And whilst he stood, the watery strife
Encroached on every hand,
And the ground decreas'd - his moments of life
Seem'd measur'd, like Time's, by sand :

And still the waters foam'd in, like ale,
In front and on either flank,
He knew that Goodwin and Co. must fail,
There was such a run on the bank.—

A little more, and a little more,
The surges came tumbling in ;
He sang the evening hymn twice o'er,
And thought of every sin !

Each flounder and plaice lay cold at his heart,
As cold as his marble slab :
And he thought he felt in every part
The pincers of scaled crab.

The squealing lobsters that he had boil'd,
And the little potted shrimps,
All the horny prawns he had ever spoil'd,
Gnaw'd into his soul, like imps !

And the billows were wandering to and fro,
And the glorious sun was sunk,
And Day, getting black in the face, as tho'
Of the night-shade she had drunk !

Had there been but a smuggler's cargo adrift
One tub, or keg, to be seen,
It might have given his spirits a lift
Or an *anker* where *Hope* might lean !

But there was not a box or a beam afloat,
To raft him from that sad place ;
Not a skiff, nor a yawl, or a mackerel boat,
Nor a smack upon Neptune's face.

At last, his lingering hopes to buoy,
He saw a sail and a mast,
And called " Ahoy ! "—but it was not a hoy,
And so the vessel went past.

And with saucy wing that flapp'd in his face,
The wild bird about him flew,
With a shrilly scream that twitted his case,
" Why, thou art a sea-gull too ! "

And lo ! the tide was over his feet ;
Oh ! his heart began to freeze,
And slowly to pulse :—in another beat
The wave was up to his knees !

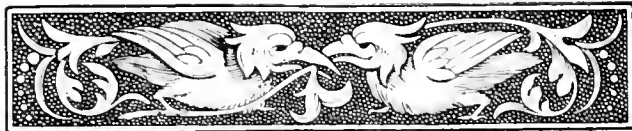


He was deafen'd amidst the mountain tops,
And the salt spray blinded his eyes,
And wash'd away the other salt-drop,
That grief had caused to arise ;—

But just as his body was all afloat
And the surges above him broke,
He was saved from the hungry deep by a boat,
Of Deal—(but builded of oak).

The skipper gave him a dram, as he lay,
And chafed his shivering skin ;
And the angel returned that was flying away
With the spirit of Peter Fin !





Hero and Leander.

TO S. T. COLERIDGE.



It is not with a hope my feeble praise
Can add one moment's honour to thy own,
That with thy mighty name I grace these lays;
I seek to glorify myself alone:

For that some precious favour thou hast shown
To my endeavour in a by-gone time,
And by this token I would have it known
Thou art my friend, and friendly to my rhyme!
It is my dear ambition now to climb
Still higher in thy thought,—if my bold pen
May thrust on contemplations more sublime.—
But I am thirsty for thy praise, for when
We gain applauses from the great in name,
We seem to be partakers of *their* fame.

On Bards of old ! what sorrows have ye sung,
And tragic stories, chronicled in stone,—
Sad Philomel restored her ravish'd tongue,
And transform'd Niobe in dumbness shown !
Sweet Sappho on her love for ever calls,
And Hero on the drown'd Leander falls !

Was it that spectacles of sadder plights
Should make our blisses relish the more high ?
Then all fair dames, and maidens, and true knights
Whose flourish'd fortunes prosper in Love's eye,
Weep here, unto a tale of Ancient grief,
Traced from the course of an old bas-relief.

There stand Abydos !—here is Sestos' steep,
Hard by the gusty margin of the sea,
Where sprinkling waves continually do leap.
And that is where those famous lovers be,
A builded gloom shot up into the grey,
As if the first tall watch-tow'r of the day.

Lo ! how the lark soars upward and is gone ;
Turning a spirit as he nears the sky,
His voice is heard, though body there is none,
And rain-like music scatters from on high ;
But Love would follow with a falcon spite,
To pluck the minstrel from his dewy height.

For love hath framed a ditty of regrets,
Tuned to the hollow sobbings on the shore,
A vexing sense, that with like music frets,
And chimes this dismal burthen o'er and o'er,
Saying Leander's joys are past and spent,
Like stars extinguish'd in the firmament.

For ere the golden crevices of morn
Let in those regal luxuries of light,
Which all the variable east adorn,
And hang rich fringes on the skirts of night,
Leander, weaning from sweet Hero's side,
Must leave a widow where he found a bride.

Hark! how the billows beat upon the sand!
Like pawing steeds impatient of delay;
Meanwhile their rider, ling'ring on the land,
Dallies with love, and holds farewell at bay
A too short span.—How tedious slow is grief!
But parting renders time both sad and brief.

“Alas!” he sigh'd, “that this first glimpsing light,
Which makes the wide world tenderly appear,
Should be the burning signal for my flight,
From all the world's best image, which is here:
Whose very shadow, in my fond compare,
Shines far more bright than Beauty's self elsewhere.”

Their cheeks are white as blossoms of the dark,
Whose leaves close up and show the outward pale,
And those fair mirrors where their joys did spark,
All dim and tarnish'd with a dreary veil,
No more to kindle till the night's return,
Like stars replenish'd at Joy's golden urn.

Ev'n thus they creep into the spectral grey,
That cramps the landscape in its narrow brim,
As when two shadows by old Lethe stray,
He clasping her, and she entwining him;
Like trees, wind-parted, that embrace anon,—
True love so often goes before 'tis gone.

For what rich merchant but will pause in fear
To trust his wealth to the unsafe abyss?
So Hero dotes upon her treasure here,
And sums the loss with many an anxious kiss,
Whilst her fond eyes grow dizzy in her head,
Fear aggravating fear with shows of dread.

She thinks how many have been sunk and drown'd,
And spies their snow-white bones below the deep,
Then calls huge congregated monsters round,
And plants a rock wherever he would leap;
Anon she dwells on a fantastic dream,
Which she interprets of that fatal stream.

Saying, "That honied fly I saw was thee,
Which lighted on a water-lily's cup,
When, lo! the flower, enamour'd of my bee,
Closed on him suddenly and lock'd him up,
And he was smother'd in her drenching dew :
Therefore this day thy drowning I shall rue."

But next, remembering her virgin fame,
She clips him in her arms and bids him go,
But seeing him break loose, repents her shame,
And plucks him back upon her bosom's snow :
And tears unfix her iced resolve again,
As steadfast frosts are thaw'd by show'rs of rain.

O for a type of parting !—Love to love
Is like the fond attraction of two spheres,
Which needs a god-like effort to remove,
And then sink down their sunny atmospheres,
In rain and darkness on each ruin'd heart,
Nor yet their melodies will sound apart.

So brave Leander sunders from his bride ;
The wrenching pang disparts his soul in twain ;
Half stays with her, half goes towards the tide,—
And life must ache, until they join again.
Now wouldst thou know the wideness of the wound ?—
Metè every step he takes upon the ground.

And for the agony and bosom-throe,
Let it be measured by the wide vast air,
For that is infinite, and so is woe,
Since parted lovers breathe it everywhere.
Look how it heaves Leander's labouring chest,
Panting, at poise, upon a rocky crest !

From which he leaps into the scooping brine,
That shocks his bosom with a double chill ;
Because, all hours, till the slow sun's decline,
That cold divorcer will be twixt them still ;
Wherefore he likens it to Styx' foul tide,
Where life grows death upon the other side.

Then sadly he confronts his two-fold toil
Against rude waves and an unwilling mind,
Wishing, alas ! with the stout rower's toil,
That like a rower he might gaze behind,
And watch that lonely statue he hath left,
On her bleak summit, weeping and bereft !

Yet turning oft, he sees her troubled locks
Pursue him still the furthest that they may !
Her marble arms that overstretch the rocks,
And her pale passion'd hands that seem to pray
In dumb petition to the gods above :
Love prays devoutly when it prays for love !

Then with deep sighs he blows away the wave,
That hangs superfluous tears upon his cheek,
And bans his labour like a hopeless slave,
That, chain'd in hostile galley, faint and weak,
Plies on despairing through the restless foam,
Thoughtful of his lost love, and far-off home.

The drowsy mist before him chill and dank,
Like a dull lethargy o'erleans the sea,
When he rows on against the utter blank,
Steering as if to dim eternity,—
Like Love's frail ghost departing with the dawn ;
A failing shadow in the twilight drawn.

And soon is gone,—or nothing but a faint
And failing image in the eye of thought.
That mocks his model with an after-paint,
And stains an atom like the shape she sought ;
Then with her earnest vows she hopes to fee
The old and hoary majesty of sea.

“ O King of waves, and brother of high Jove,
Preserve my sunless venture there afloat ;
A woman's heart, and its whole wealth of love,
Are all embark'd upon that little boat ;
Nay, but two loves, two lives, a double fate,—
A perilous voyage for so dear a freight.

“ If impious mariners be stain'd with crime,
Shake not in awful rage thy hoary locks ;
Lay by thy storms until another time,
Lest my frail bark be dash'd against the rocks :
O rather smooth thy deeps, that he may fly
Like Love himself, upon a seeming sky !

“ Let all thy herded monsters sleep beneath,
Nor gore him with crook'd tusks, or wreathed horns ;
Let no fierce sharks destroy him with their teeth,
Nor spine-fish wound him with their venom'd thorns ;
But if he faint, and timely succour lack,
Let ruthful dolphins rest him on their back.

“ Let no false dimpling whirlpools suck him in,
Nor slimy quicksands smother his sweet breath ;
Let no jagg'd coral tear his tender skin,
Nor mountain billows bury him in death : ”
And with that thought forestalling her own fears,
She drown'd his painted image in her tears.

By this, the climbing Sun, with rest repair'd,
Look'd through the gold embrasures of the sky,
And ask'd the drowsy world how she had fared :—
The drowsy world shone brighten'd in reply ;
And smiling off her fogs, his slanting beam
Spied young Leander in the middle stream.

His face was pallid, but the hectic morn
Had hung a lying crimson on his cheek,
And slanderous sparkles in his eyes forlorn ;
So death lies ambush'd in consumptive streaks ;
But inward grief was writhing o'er its task,
As heart-sick jesters weep behind the mask.

He thought of Hero and the lost delight,
Her last embracing, and the space between ;
He thought of Hero and the future night,
Her speechless rapture and enamour'd mien,
When, lo ! before him, scarce two galley's space,
His thoughts contracted with another face !

Her aspect's like a moon, divinely fair,
But makes the midnight darker that it lies on :
'Tis so beclouded with her coal black hair
That densely skirts her luminous horizon,
Making her doubly fair, thus darkly set,
As marble lies advantaged upon jet.

She's all too bright, too argent, and too pale,
To be a woman ;—but a woman's double,
Reflected on the wave so faint and frail,
She tops the billows like an air-blown bubble ,
Or dim creation of a morning dream,
Fair as the wave-bleach'd lily of the stream.

The very rumour strikes his seeing dead :
Great beauty like great fear first stuns the sense :
He knows not if her lips be blue or red,
Nor of her eyes can give true evidence :
Like murder's witness swooning in the court,
His sight falls senseless by its own report.

Anon resuming, it declares her eyes
Are tint with azure, like two crystal wells
That drink the blue complexion of the skies,
Or pearls outpeeping from their silvery shells :
Her polish'd brow, it is an ample plain,
To lodge vast contemplations of the main.

Her lips might corals seem, but corals near,
Stray through her hair like blossoms on a bower !
And o'er the weaker red still domineer,
And make it pale by tribute to more power ;
Her rounded cheeks are of still paler hue,
Touch'd by the bloom of water, tender blue.

Thus he beholds her rocking on the water,
Under the glossy umbrage of her hair,
Like pearly Amphitrite's fairest daughter,
Naiad, or Nereid, or Syren fair,
Mislodging music in her pitiless breast,
A nightingale within a falcon's nest.

They say there be such maidens in the deep,
Charming poor mariners, that all too near
By mortal lullabies fall dead asleep,
As drowsy men are poison'd through the ear ;
Therefore Leander's fears begin to urge,
This snowy swan is come to sing his dirge.

At which he falls into a deadly chill,
And strains his eyes upon her lips apart ;
Fearing each breath to feel that prelude shrill,
Pierce through his marrow, like a death-blown dart
Shot sudden from an Indian's hollow cane,
With mortal venom fraught, and fiery pain.

Here then, poor wretch, how he begins to crowd
A thousand thoughts within a pulse's space :
There seem'd so brief a pause of life allow'd,
His mind stretch'd universal, to embrace
The whole wide world, in an extreme farewell,—
A moment's musing— but an age to tell.

For there stood Hero, widow'd at a glance,
The foreseen sum of many a tedious fact,
Pale cheeks, dim eyes, and wither'd countenance,
A wasted ruin that no wasting lack'd ;
Time's tragic consequents ere time began,
A world of sorrow in a tear-drop's span.

A moment's thinking is an hour in words,—
An hour of words is little for some woes ;
Too little breathing a long life affords
For love to paint itself by perfect shows :
Then let his love and grief unwrong'd lie dumb,
Whilst Fear, and that it fears, together come.

As when the crew, hard by some jutting cape,
Struck pale and panick'd by the billows' roar,
Lay by all timely measures of escape,
And let their bark go driving on the shore ;
So fray'd Leander, drifting to his wreck,
Gazing upon Scylla, falls upon her neck.

For he hath all forgot the swimmer's art,
The rower's cunning, and the pilot's skill,
Letting his arms fall down in languid part,
Sway'd by the waves, and nothing by his will,
Till soon he jars against that glossy skin,
Solid like glass, though seemingly as thin.

Lo ! how she startles at the warning shock,
And straightway girds him to her radiant breast,
More like his safe smooth harbour than his rock :
Poor wretch, he is so faint and toil-opprest,
He cannot loose him from his grappling foe,
Whether for love or hate, she lets not go.

His eyes are blinded with the sleeting brine,
His ears are deafen'd with the wildering noise ;
He asks the purpose of her fell design,
But foamy waves choke up his struggling voice ;
Under the ponderous sea his body dips,
And Hero's name dies bubbling on his lips,

Look how a man is lower'd to his grave,—
A yearning hollow in the green earth's lap
So he is sunk into the yawning wave,—
The plunging sea fills up the watery gap ;
Anon he is all gone, and nothing seen
But likeness of green turf and hillocks green.

And where he swam, the constant sun lies sleeping,
Over the verdant plain that makes his bed ;
And all the noisy waves go freshly leaping,
Like gamesome boys over the churchyard dead ;
The light in vain keeps looking for his face :—
Now screaming sea-fowl settle in his place.

Yet weep and watch for him, though all in vain !
Ye moaning billows, seek him as ye wander !
Ye gazing sunbeams, look for him again !
Ye winds, grow hoarse with asking for Leander !
Ye did but spare him for more cruel rape,
Sea storm and ruin in a female shape !

She says 'tis love hath bribed her to this deed
The glancing of his eyes did so bewitch her.
O bootless theft ! unprofitable meed !
Love's treasury is sack'd, but she no richer ;
The sparkles of his eyes are cold and dead,
And all his golden looks are turned to lead !

She holds the casket, but her simple hand
Hath spill'd its dearest jewel by the way !
She hath life's empty garment at command,
But her own death lies covert in the prey ;
As if a thief should steal a tainted vest,
Some dead man's spoil, and sicken of the pest.

Now she compels him to her deeps below,
Hiding his face beneath her plenteous hair,
Which jealously she shakes all round her brow,
For dread of envy, though no eyes are there
But seals', and all brute tenants of the deep,
Which heedless through the wave their journey keep.

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore him, murmuring with joyous haste
In too rash ignorance, as he had been
Born to the texture of that watery waste ;
That which she breathed and sigh'd, the emerald wave !
How could her pleasant home become his grave ?

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore her treasure, with a face too nigh
To mark how life was alter'd in its mien,
Or how the light grew torpid in his eye,
Or how his pearly breath, unprison'd there,
Flew up to join the universal air.

She could not miss the throbbings of his heart,
Whilst her own pulse so wanton'd in its joy ;
She could not guess he struggled to depart,
And when he strove no more, the hapless boy !
She read his mortal stillness for content,
Feeling no fear where only love was meant.

Soon she alights upon her ocean-floor,
And straight unyokes her arms from her fair prize ;
Then on his lovely face begins to pore,
As if to glut her soul ;—her hungry eyes
Have grown so jealous of her arms' delight ;
It seems she hath no other sense but sight.

But O sad marvel ! O most bitter strange !
What dismal magic makes his cheek so pale ?
Why will he not embrace,—why not exchange
Her kindly kisses ; wherefore not exhale
Some odorous message from life's ruby gates,
Where she his first sweet embassy awaits ?

Her eyes, poor watchers, fixed upon his looks,
Are grappled with a wonder near to grief,
As one, who pores on undecipher'd books,
Strains vain surmise, and dodges with belief;
So she keeps gazing with a mazy thought,
Framing a thousand doubts that end in nought.

Too stern inscription for a page so young,
The dark translation of his look was death!
But death was written in an alien tongue,
And learning was not by to give it breath;
So one deep woe sleeps buried in its seal,
Which Time, untimely, hasteth to reveal.

Meanwhile she sits unconscious of her hap,
Nursing Death's marble effigy, which there
With heavy head lies pillow'd in her lap,
And elbows all unhinged;—his sleeking hair
Creeps o'er her knees, and settles where his hand
Leans with wax fingers crook'd against the sand;

And there lies spread in many an oozy trail,
Like glossy weeds hung from a chalky base,
That shows no whiter than his brow is pale
So soon the wintry death had bleach'd his face
Into cold marble,—with blue chilly shades,
Showing wherein the freezy blood pervades

And o'er his steadfast cheek a furrow'd pain
Hath set, and stiffen'd, like a storm in ice,
Showing by drooping lines the deadly strain
Of mortal anguish ;—yet you might gaze twice
Ere Death it seem'd, and not his cousin, Sleep,
That through those creviced lids did underpeep.

But all that tender bloom about his eyes,
Is Death's own violets, which his utmost rite
It is to scatter when the red rose dies ;
For blue is chilly, and akin to white.
Also he leaves some tinges on his lips,
Which he hath kiss'd with such cold frosty nips.

“ Surely,” quoth she, “ he sleeps, the senseless thing,
Oppress'd and faint with toiling in the stream ! ”
Therefore she will not mar his rest, but sing
So low, her tune shall mingle with his dream ;
Meanwhile, her lily fingers task to twine
His uncrispt locks uncurling in the brine.

“ O lovely boy ! ” thus she attuned her voice,—
“ Welcome, thrice welcome, to a sea-maid's home,
My love-mate thou shalt be, and true heart's choice ;
How have I long'd such a twin-self should come,—
A lonely thing, till this sweet chance befel,
My heart kept sighing like a hollow shell.

“ Here thou shalt live, beneath this secret dome,
An ocean bow'r ; defended by the shade
Of quiet waters, a cool emerald gloom
To lap thee all about. Nay, be not fray'd,
Those are but shady fishes that sail by
Like antic clouds across my liquid sky !

“ Look how the sunbeam burns upon their scales,
And shows rich glimpses of their Tyrian skies ;
They flash small lightnings from their vigorous tails,
And winking stars are kindled at their fins ;
These shall divert thee in thy weariest mood,
And seek thy hand for gamesomeness and food.

“ Lo ! those green pretty leaves with tassel bells,
My flow'rets those, that never pine for drowth ;
Myself did plant them in the dappled shells,
That drink the wave with such a rosy mouth,—
Pearls wouldst thou have beside ? crystals to shine ?
I had such treasures once,—now they are thine.

“ Now lay thine ear against this golden sound,
And thou shalt hear the music of the sea,
Those hollow tunes it plays against the land,—
Is't not a rich and wondrous melody ?
I have lain hours, and fancied in its tone
I heard the languages of ages gone !

“ I too can sing when it shall please thy choice,
And breathe soft tunes through a melodious shell,
Though heretofore I have but set my voice
To some long sighs, grief harmonized, to tell
How desolate I fared ;—but this sweet change
Will add new notes of gladness to my range !

“ Or bid me speak, and I will tell thee tales,
Which I have framed out of the noise of waves ;
Ere now I have communed with senseless gales,
And held vain colloquies with barren caves ;
But I could talk to thee whole days and days,
Only to word my love a thousand ways.

“ But if thy lips will bless me with their speech,
Then ope, sweet oracles ! and I'll be mute ;
I was born ignorant for thee to teach,
Nay all love's lore to thy dear looks impute ;
Then ope thine eyes, fair teachers, by whose light
I saw to give away my heart aright !”

But cold and deaf the sullen creature lies
Over her knees, and with concealing clay,
Like hoarding Avarice, locks up his eyes,
And leaves her world impoverish'd of day ;
Then at his cruel lips she bends to plead,
But there the door is closed against her need.

Surely he sleeps,—so her false wits infer !
Alas ! poor sluggard, ne'er to wake again !
Surely he sleeps, yet without any stir
That might denote a vision in his brain ;
Or if he does not sleep, he feigns too long,
Twice she hath reach'd the ending of her song.

Therefore 'tis time she tells him to uncover
Those radiant jesters, and disperse her fears,
Whereby her April face is shaded over,
Like rainy clouds just ripe for showering tears ;
Nay, if he will not wake, so poor she gets,
Herself must rob those lock'd-up cabinets.

With that she stoops above his brow, and bids
Her busy hands forsake his tangled hair
And tenderly lift up those coffer-lids,
That she may gaze upon the jewels there.
Like babes that pluck an early bud apart,
To know the dainty colour of its heart.

Now, picture one, soft creeping to a bed,
Who slowly parts the fringe-hung canopies,
And then starts back to find the sleeper dead
So she looks in on his uncover'd eyes,
And seeing all within so drear and dark,
Her own bright soul dies in her like a spark

Backward she falls, like a pale prophetess,
Under the swoon of holy divination :
And what had all surpass'd her simple guess,
She now resolves in this dark revelation :
Death's very mystery,—oblivious death :—
Long sleep,—deep night, and an entranced breath.

Yet life, though wounded sore, not wholly slain,
Merely obscured, and not extinguish'd, lies ;
Her breath that stood at ebb, soon flows again,
Heaving her hollow breast with heavy sighs,
And light comes in and kindles up the gloom,
To light her spirit from its transient tomb.

Then like the sun, awaken'd at new dawn,
With pale bewilder'd face she peers about,
And spies blurr'd images obscurely drawn,
Uncertain shadows in a haze of doubt ;
But her true grief grows shapely by degrees,—
A perish'd creature lying on her knees.

And now she knows how that old Murther preys,
Whose quarry on her lap lies newly slain :
How he roams all abroad and grimly slays,
Like a lean tiger in Love's own domain ;
Putting fond mates, and oft in flowery lawns
Bereaves mild mothers of their milky fawns.

O too dear knowledge ! O pernicious earning !
Foul curse engraven upon beauty's page !
Ev'n now the sorrow of that deadly learning
Ploughs up her brow, like an untimely age,
And on her cheek stamps verdict of death's truth
By canker blights upon the bud of youth !

For as unwholesome winds decay the leaf,
So her cheeks' rose is perish'd by her sighs,
And withers in the sickly breath of grief ;
Whilst unacquainted rheum bedims her eyes,
Tears, virgin tears, the first that ever leapt
From those young lids, now plentifully wept.

Whence being shed, the liquid crystalline
Drops straightway down, refusing to partake
In gross admixture with the baser brine,
But shrinks and hardens into pearls opaque,
Hereafter to be worn on arms and ears ;
So one maid's trophy is another's tears !

“ O foul Arch-Shadow, thou old cloud of Night,”
(Thus in her frenzy she began to wail,)—
“ Thou blank Oblivion—Blotter out of light,
Life's ruthless murderer, and dear love's bale !
Why hast thou left thy havoc incomplete,
Leaving me here, and slaying the more sweet ?

“ Lo! what a lovely ruin thou hast made,
Alas! alas! thou hast no eye to see,
And blindly slew'st him in misguided shade.
Would I had lent my doting sense to thee!
But now I turn to thee, a willing mark,
Thine arrows miss me in the aimless dark!

“ O doubly cruel!—twice misdoing spite
But I will guide thee with my helping eyes,
Or—walk the wide world through, devoid of sight,—
Yet thou shalt know me by my many sighs.
Nay, then thou should'st have spared my rose, false Death,
And known Love's flow'r by smelling his sweet breath;

“ Or when thy furious rage was round him dealing,
Love should have grown from touching of his skin;
But like cold marble thou art all unfeeling,
And hast no ruddy springs of warmth within,
And being but a shape of freezing bone,
Thy touching only turn'd my love to stone!

“ And here, alas! he lies across my knees,
With cheeks still colder than the stilly wave.
The light beneath his eyelids seems to freeze;
Here then, since Love is dead and lacks a grave,
O come and dig it in my sad heart's core—
That wound will bring a balsam for its sore!

“ For art thou not a sleep where sense of ill
Lies stingless, like a sense benumb'd with cold,
Healing all hurts only with sleep's good-will !
So shall I slumber, and perchance behold
My living love in dreams,—O happy night,
That lets me company his banish'd spright !

“ O poppy Death !—sweet poisoner of sleep,
Where shall I seek for thee, oblivious drug,
That I may steep thee in my drink, and creep
Out of life's coil ? Look, idol ! how I hug
Thy dainty image in this strict embrace,
And kiss this clay clod model of thy face !

“ Put out, put out, these sun consuming lamps,
I do but read my sorrows by their shine ;
O come and quench them with thy oozy damps,
And let my darkness intermix with thine ;
Since love is blinded, wherefore should I see ?
Now love is death,—death will be love to me !

“ Away, away, this vain complaining breath,
It does but stir the troubles that I weep ;
Let it be hush'd and quieted, sweet Death ;
The wind must settle ere the wave can sleep,—
Since love is silent, I would fain be mute ;
O Death, be gracious to my dying suit !”

Thus far she pleads, but pleading nought avails her,
For Death, her sullen burthen, deigns no heed ;
Then with dumb craving arms, since darkness fails her,
She prays to Heaven's fair light, as if her need
Inspired her there were Gods to pity pain,
Or end it,—but she lift her arms in vain !

Poor gilded Grief ! the subtle light by this
With mazy gold creeps through her watery mine,
And, diving downward through the green abyss,
Lights up her palace with an amber shine ;
There, falling on her arms,—the crystal skin
Reveals the ruby tide that fares within.

Look how the fulsome beam would hang a glory
On her dark hair, but the dark hairs repel it ;
Look how the perjured glow suborns a story
On her pale lips, but lips refuse to tell it ;
Grief will not swerve from grief, however told
On coral lips, or character'd in gold ;

Or else, thou maid ! safe anchor'd on Love's neck,
Listing the hapless doom of young Leander,
Thou would'st not shed a tear for that old wreck,
Sitting secure where no wild surges wander ;
Whereas the woe moves on with tragic pace,
And shows its sad reflection in thy face.

Thus having travell'd on, and track'd the tale,
Like the due course of an old bas-relief,
Where Tragedy pursues her progress pale,
Brood here awhile upon that sea-maid's grief,
And take a deeper imprint from the frieze
Of that young Fate, with Death upon her knees.

Then whilst the melancholy Muse withal
Resumes her music in a sadder tone,
Meanwhile the sunbeam strikes upon the wall,
Conceive that lovely siren to live on,
Ev'n as Hope whisper'd the Promethean light
Would kindle up the dead Leander's spright.

" 'Tis light," she says, " that feeds the glittering stars,
And those were stars set in his heavenly brow ;
But this salt cloud, this cold sea-vapour, mars
Their radiant breathing, and obscures them now
Therefore I'll lay him in the clear blue air,
And see how these dull orbs will kindle there."

Swiftly as dolphins glide, or swifter yet,
With dead Leander in her fond arms' fold,
She cleaves the meshes of that radiant net
The sun bath twined above of liquid gold,
Nor slacks till on the margin of the land
She lays his body on the glowing sand.

There like a pearly waif, just past the reach
Of foamy billows he lies cast. Just then,
Some listless fishers, straying down the beach,
Spy out this wonder. Thence the curious men,
Low crouching, creep into a thicket brake,
And watch her doings till their rude hearts ache.

First she begins to chafe him till she faints,
Then falls upon his mouth with kisses many,
And sometimes pauses in her own complaints
To list his breathing, but there is not any,—
Then looks into his eyes where no light dwells;
Light makes no pictures in such muddy wells.

The hot sun parches his discover'd eyes,
The hot sun beats on his discolour'd limbs,
The sand is oozy whereupon he lies,
Soiling his fairness ;—then away she swims,
Meaning to gather him a daintier bed,
Plucking the cool fresh weeds, brown, green and red.

But, simple-witted thief, while she dives under,
Another robs her of her amorous theft ;
The ambush'd fishermen creep forth to plunder,
And steal the unwatch'd treasure she has left ;
Only his void impression dints the sands ;
Leander is purloin'd by stealthy hands !

Lo ! how she shudders off the beaded wave,
Like grief all over tears, and senseless falls,—
His void imprint seems hollow'd for her grave ;
Then, rising on her knees, looks round and calls
On “ Hero ! Hero ! ” having learn'd this name
Of his last breath, she calls him by the same.

Then, with her frantic hands she rends her hairs,
And casts them forth, sad keepsakes to the wind,
As if in plucking those she pluck'd her cares ;
But grief lies deeper, and remains behind
Like a barb'd arrow, rankling in her brain,
Turning her very thoughts to throbs of pain.

Anon her tangled locks are left alone,
And down upon the sand she meekly sits,
Hard by the foam, as humble as a stone,
Like an enchanted maid beside her wits,
That ponders with a look serene and tragic,
Stunn'd by the mighty mystery of magic.

Or think of Ariadne's utter trance,
Crazed by the flight of that disloyal traitor,
Who left her gazing on the green expanse
That swallow'd up his track,—yet this would mate her,
Ev'n in the cloudy summit of her woe,
When o'er the far sea-brim she saw him go.

For even so she bows, and bends her gaze
O'er the eternal waste, as if to sum
Its waves by weary thousands all her days,
Dismally doom'd ! meanwhile the billows come,
And coldly dabble with her quiet feet,
Like any bleaching stones they wont to greet.

And thence into her lap have boldly sprung,
Washing her weedy tresses to and fro,
That round her crouching knees have darkly hung
But she sits careless of waves' ebb and flow,
Like a lone beacon on a desert coast,
Showing where all her hope was wreck'd and lost.

Yet whether in the sea or vaulted sky,
She knoweth not her love's abrupt resort,
So like a shape of dreams he left her eye,
Winking with doubt. Meanwhile, the churl's report
Has throng'd the beach with many a curious face,
That peeps upon her from its hiding place.

And here a head, and there a brow half seen,
Dodges behind a rock. Here on his hands
A mariner his crumpled cheeks doth lean
Over a rugged crust. Another stands,
Holding his harmful arrow at the head,
Still check'd by human caution and strange dread.

One stops his ears,—another close beholder
Whispers unto the next his grave surmise ;
This crouches down,—and just above his shoulder
A woman's pity saddens in her eyes,
And prompts her to befriend that lonely grief,
With all sweet helps of sisterly relief.

And down the sunny beach she paces slowly,
With many doubtful pauses by the way ;
Grief hath an influence so hush'd and holy,—
Making her twice attempt, ere she can lay
Her hand upon that sea-maid's shoulder white,
Which makes her startle up in wild affright.

And, like a seal, she leaps into the wave
That drowns the shrill remainder of her scream
Anon the sea fills up the watery cave,
And seals her exit with a foamy seam,—
Leaving those baffled gazers on the beach,
Turning in uncouth wonder each to each.

Some watch, some call, some see her head emerge
Wherever a brown weed falls through the foam ;
Some point to white eruptions of the surge :—
But she is vanish'd to her shady home,
Under the deep, inscrutable,—and there
Weeps in a midnight made of her own hair.

Now here, the sighing winds, before unheard,
Forth from their cloudy caves begin to blow
Till all the surface of the deep is stirr'd,
Like to the panting grief it hides below ;
And heaven is cover'd with a stormy rack,
Soiling the waters with its inky black.

The screaming fowl resigns her finny prey,
And labours shoreward with a bending wing,
Rowing against the wind her toilsome way ;
Meanwhile, the curling billows chafe, and fling
Their dewy frost still further on the stones,
That answer to the wind with hollow groans.

And here and there a fisher's far-off bark
Flies with the sun's last glimpse upon its sail,
Like a bright flame amid the waters dark,
Watch'd with the hope and fear of maiden's pale ;
And anxious mothers that upturn their brows,
Freighting the gusty wind with frequent vows,

For that the horrid deep has no sure path
To guide Love safe into his homely haven.
And lo ! the storm grows blacker in its wrath,
O'er the dark billow brooding like a raven,
That bodes of death and widow's sorrowing,
Under the dusky covert of his wing.



And so day ended. But no vesper spark
Hung forth its heavenly sign ; but sheets of flame
Play'd round the savage features of the dark,
Making night horrible. That night, there came
A weeping maiden to high Sestos' steep,
And tore her hair and gazed upon the deep.

And waved aloft her bright and ruddy torch,
Whose flame the boastful wind so rudely fann'd,
That oft it would recoil, and basely scorch
The tender covert of her sheltering hand ;
Which yet, for Love's dear sake, disdain'd retire
And, like a glorying martyr, braved the fire.

For that was Love's own sign and beacon guide
Across the Hellespont's wide weary space,
Wherein he nightly struggled with the tide :—
Look what a red it forges on her face,
As if she blush'd at holding such a light,
Ev'n in the unseen presence of the night !

Whereas her tragic cheek is truly pale,
And colder than the rude and ruffian air
That howls into her ear a horrid tale
Of storm and wreck, and uttermost despair.
Saying, " Leander floats amid the surge,
And those are dismal waves that sing his dirge."

And hark!—a grieving voice, trembling and faint,
Blends with the hollow sobbings of the sea;
Like the sad music of a siren's plaint,
But shriller than Leander's voice should be
Unless the wintry death had changed its tone,—
Wherefore she thinks she hears his spirit moan.

For now, upon each brief and breathless pause,
Made by the raging winds it plainly calls
On "Hero! Hero!"—whereupon she draws
Close to the dizzy brink, that ne'er appals
Her brave and constant spirit to recoil,
However the wild billows toss and toil.

"Oh! dost thou live under the deep deep sea?
I thought such love as thine could never die!
If thou hast gained an immortality
From the kind pitying sea-god, so will I;
And this false cruel tide that used to sever
Our hearts, shall be our common home for ever!

"There we will sit and sport upon one billow,
And sing our ocean ditties all the day,
And lie together on the same green billow,
That curls above us with its dewy spray!
And ever in one presence live and dwell,
Like two twin pearls within the self same shell."

One moment then, upon the dizzy verge
She stands ;—with face upturn'd against the sky ;
A moment more, upon the foamy surge
She gazes, with a calm despairing eye ;
Feeling that awful pause of blood and breath,
Which life endures when it confronts with death ;—

Then from the giddy steep she madly springs,
Grasping her maiden robes, that vainly kept
Panting abroad, like unavailing wings,
To save her from her death.—The sea-maid wept
And in a crystal cave her corse enshrined ;
No meaner sepulchre should Hero find.





A Legend of Navarre.

T WAS in the reign of Lewis, call'd the Great,
As one may read on his triumphal arches,
The thing befel I'm going to relate,
In course of one of those "pomposo" marches
He lov'd to make, like any gorgeous Persian,
Partly for war, and partly for diversion.

Some wag had it put in the royal brain
To drop a visit at an old chateau,
Quite unexpected, with his courtly train ;
The monarch lik'd it,—but it happened so,
That Death had got before them by a post,
And they were "reckoning without their *host*."

Who died exactly as a child should die,
Without a groan or a convulsive breath
Closing without one pang his quiet eye,
Sliding composedly from sleep—to death ;
A corpse so placid ne'er adorn'd a bed,
He had seem'd not quite—but only rather dead.

All night the widow'd Baroness contriv'd
To shed a widow's tears ; but on the morrow
Some news of such unusual sort arriv'd,
There came strange alteration in her sorrow ;
From mouth to mouth it pass'd, one common humming
Throughout the house—the King ! the King is coming.

The Baroness, with all her soul and heart,
A loyal woman, (now called ultra loyal,)
Soon thrust all funeral concerns apart,
And only thought about a banquet royal ;
In short, by aid of earnest preparation,
The visit quite dismiss'd the visitation.

And, spite of all her grief for the ex-mate,
There was a secret hope she could not smother,
That some one, early, might replace “ the late ”—
It was too soon to think about another ;
Yet let her minutes of despair be reckon'd
Against her hope, which was but for a *second*.

She almost thought that being thus bereft
Just then, was one of time's propitious touches ;
A thread in such a nick so nick'd, it left
Free opportunity to be a duchess ;
Thus all her care was only to look pleasant,
But as for tears—she dropp'd them—for the present.

Her household, as good servants ought to try,
Look'd like their lady—anything but sad,
And giggled even that they might not cry,
To damp fine company ; in truth they had
No time to mourn, thro' choking turkeys' throttles,
Scouring old laces, and reviewing bottles.

Oh what a hubbub for the house of woe !
Ail, resolute to one irresolution,
Kept tearing, swearing, plunging to and fro,
Just like another French mob revolution.
There lay the corpse that could not stir a muscle,
But all the rest seem'd Chaos in a bustle.

The Monarch came : oh ! who could ever guess
The Baroness had been so late a weeper !
The kingly grace and more than graciousness,
Buried the poor defunct some fathoms deeper—
Could he have had a glance—alas poor Being !
Seeing would certainly have led to *D*—ing.

For casting round about her eyes to find
Some one to whom her chattels to endorse,
The comfortable dame at last inclin'd
To choose the cheerful Master of the Horse ;
He was so gay,—so tender,—the complete
Nice man,—the sweetest of the monarch's suite.



He saw at once and enter'd in the lists —
Glance unto glance made amorous replies ;
They talk'd together like two egotists,
In conversation all made up of *eyes* :
No couple ever got so right consort-ish
Within two hours—a courtship rather shortish.

At last, some sleepy, some by wine opprest,
The courtly company began “nid noddin’,”
The King first sought his chamber, and the rest
Instantly followed by the course he trod in.
I shall not please the scandalous by showing
The order, or disorder of their going.

The old Chateau, before that night, had never
Held half so many underneath its roof,
It task'd the Baroness's best endeavour,
And put her best contrivance to the proof,
To give them chambers up and down the stairs,
In twos and threes, by singles, and by pairs.

She had just lodging for the whole—yet barely
And some, that were both broad of back and tall,
Lay on spare beds that served them very sparsely ;
However, there were beds enough for all ;
But living bodies occupied so many
She could not let the dead one take up any.

The act was, certainly, not over decent :
Some small respect, e'en after death, she ow'd him,
Considering his death had been so recent :
However, by command, her servants stow'd him,
(I am asham'd to think how he was slubber'd,)
Stuck bold upright within a corner cupboard !

And there he slept as soundly as a post,
With no more pillow than an oaken shelf,
Just like a kind accommodating host,
Taking all inconvenience on himself.
None else slept in that room, except a stranger, .
A decent man, a sort of Forest Ranger.

Who, whether he had gone too soon to bed,
Or dreamt himself into an appetite,
Howbeit he took a longing to be fed,
About the hungry middle of the night ;
So getting forth, he sought some scrap to eat,
Hopeful of some stray pasty, or cold meat.

The casual glances of the midnight moon,
Bright'ning some antique ornaments of brass,
Guided his gropings to that corner soon,
Just where it stood, the collin-safe, alas !
He tried the door- then shook it --and in course
Of time it open'd to a little force.

He put one hand in, and began to grope ;
The place was very deep and quite as dark as
The middle night ;—when lo ! beyond his hope,
He felt a something cold, in fact, the carcase ;
Right overjoy'd, he laugh'd, and blest his luck
At finding, as he thought, this haunch of buck !

Then striding back for his couteau de chasse,
Determined on a little midnight lunching,
He came again and prob'd about the mass,
As if to find the fattest bit for munching ;
Not meaning wastefully to cut it all up,
But only to abstract a little collop.

But just as he had struck one greedy stroke,
His hand fell down quite powerless and weak ;
For when he cut the haunch it plainly spoke
As haunch of ven'son never ought to speak ;
No wonder that his hand could go no further—
Whose could?—to carve cold meat that bellow'd, “murther !”

Down came the Body with a bounce, and down
The Ranger sprang, a staircase at a spring,
And bawl'd enough to waken up a town !

Some thought that *they* were murder'd, some, the King,
And, like Macduff, did nothing for a season,
But stand upon the spot and bellow, “Treason !”

A hundred nightcaps gather'd in a mob,
Torches drew torches, swords brought swords together,
It seem'd so dark and perilous a job ;
The Baroness came trembling like a feather
Just in the rear, as pallid as a corse.
Leaning against the Master of the Horse.

A dozen of the bravest up the stair,
Well lighted and well watch'd began to clamber ;
They sought the door—they found it—they were there,
A dozen heads went poking in the chamber ;
And lo ! with one hand planted on his hurt,
There stood the body bleeding thro' his shirt,—

No passive corse—but like a duellist
Just smarting from a scratch—in fierce position,
One hand advanced, and ready to resist ;
In fact, the Baron doff'd the apparition,
Swearing those oaths the French delight in most,
And for the second time “ gave up the ghost ! ”

A living miracle !—for why ?—the knife
That cuts so many off from grave gray hairs,
Had only carv'd him kindly into life :
How soon it chang'd the posture of affairs !
The difference one person more or less
Will make in families, is past all guess.

There stood the Baroness—no widow yet
Here stood the Baron—"in the body" still
There stood the Horses' Master in a pet,
Choking with disappointment's bitter pill,
To see the hope of his reversion fail,
Like that of riding on a donkey's tail.

The Baron liv'd—'twas nothing but a trance :
The lady died—'twas nothing but a death :
The cupboard-cut serv'd only to enhance
This postscript to the old Baronial breath :
He soon forgave, for the revival's sake,
A little *chop* intended for a *steak* !





Our Lady's Chapel.

A LEGEND OF COBLENZ.



HOE'ER has crossed the Mosel Bridge,
And mounted by the fort of Kaiser Franz,
Has seen, perchance,
Just on the summit of St. Peter's ridge,
A little open chapel to the right,
Wherein the tapers aye are burning bright ;
So popular, indeed, this holy shrine,
At least among the female population,
By night, or at high noon, you see it shine,
A very Missal for *illumination* !

Yet, when you please, at morn or eve, go by
All other Chapels, standing in the fields,
Whose mouldy, wifeless husbandry but yields
Beans, peas, potatoes, mangel-wurzel, rye,
And lo ! the Virgin, lonely, dark, and hush,
Without the glimmer of a farthing rush !



But on St. Peter's Hill

The lights are burning, burning, burning still.
In fact, it is a pretty retail trade
To furnish forth the candles ready made ;
And close beside the chapel and the way,
A chandler, at her stall, sits day by day,
And sells, both long and short, the waxen tapers
Smarten'd with tinsel-foil and tinted papers.

To give of the mysterious truth an inkling,
Those who in this bright chapel breathe a prayer
To " Unser Frou," and burn a taper there,
Are said to get a husband " in a twinkling : "
Just as she-glowworms, if it be not scandal,
Catch partners with *their* matrimonial candle.

How kind of blessed saints in heaven—
Where none in marriage, we are told, are given—
To interfere below in making matches,
And help old maidens to connubial catches !
The truth is, that instead of looking smugly
(At least, so whisper wags satirical)
The votaries are all so old and ugly,
No man could fall in love but by a miracle.

However, that such waxen gifts and vows
Are sometimes for the purpose efficacious,
In helping to a spouse,
Is vouch'd for by a story most veracious.

A certain Woman, though in name a wife,
Yet doom'd to lonely life,
Her truant husband having been away
Nine years, two months, a week, and half a day,—
Without remembrances by words or deeds,—
Began to think she had sufficient handle
To talk of widowhood and burn her weeds—
Of course with a wax-candle.

Sick, single-handed with the world to grapple,
Weary of solitude, and spleen, and vapours,
Away she hurried to Our Lady's Chapel,
Full-handed with *two* tapers—
And pray'd as she had never pray'd before,
To be a *bonâ fide* wife once more
“ Oh Holy Virgin! listen to my prayer!
And for sweet mercy, and thy sex's sake,
Accept the vows and offerings I make --
Others set up one light, but here's a *pair* ”

Her prayer, it seem'd was heard ;
For in three little weeks, exactly reckon'd,
As blithe as any bird,
She stood before the Priest with Hans the Second ;—
A fact which made her gratitude so hearty,
To " Unser Frou," and her propitious shrine,
She sent two waxen candles superfine,
Long enough for a Lapland evening party !

Rich was the Wedding Feast and rare—
What sausages were there !
Of sweets and sourd there was a perfect glut :
With plenteous liquors to wash down good cheer.
Brantwein, and Rhum, Kirsch-wasser, and Krug Bier,
And wine so *sharp* that ev'ry one was *cut*.
Rare was the feast—but rarer was the quality
Of mirth, of smoky-joke, and song, and toast,—
When just in all the middle of their jollity,—
With bumpers fill'd to hostess and to host,
And all the unborn branches of their house,
Unwelcome and unask'd like Banquo's Ghost,
In walk'd the long-lost Spouse !

What pen could ever paint !
The hubbub when the Hubs were thus confronted !

The bridesmaids fitfully began to faint ;
The bridesmen stared—some whistled and some grunted :
Fierce Hans the First look'd like a boar that's hunted ;
Poor Hans the Second like a suckling calf :
Meanwhile, confounded by the double miracle,
The two-fold bride sobb'd out, with tears hysterical,
“ Oh Holy Virgin, you're too good—*by half!*”

MORAL.

Ye Coblenz maids, take warning by the rhyme,
And as our Christian laws forbid polygamy
For fear of bigamy,
Only light up *one* taper at a time.



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